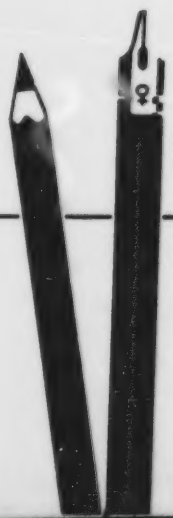
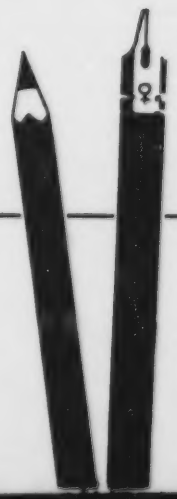
ACTION RESEARCH

FOR WOMEN'S GROUPS

Women's Research Centre



THE WOMEN'S RESEARCH CENTRE AND OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH



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III. **MAKING THE DECISION TO DO A RESEARCH PROJECT**
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VI. **COMMUNICATING THE FINDINGS OF AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT**

The Women's Research Centre thanks the Secretary of State, Women's Program for its funding.

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The Women's Research Centre is a feminist organization, founded in Vancouver in 1973. Our aim is to work with women (primarily through community-based women's groups) who do not normally have access to research facilities to assist them in acquiring the information, analysis and/or skills they need to take action on issues of concern to them. Our focus is action research.

In our work we begin with women: the issues to be investigated are identified by women and women's groups who work in the area. An important premise of the Centre's approach is that we do not undertake research from the "outside"— we are not detached observers who develop an analysis in isolation from women actively involved in an issue. Instead, we work with women who already have experience and knowledge through their involvement with an issue, and assist them in developing research and evaluation projects which will meet their needs and make women's experience visible. Women define the research and conduct it themselves with the Centre's assistance. We suggest the kinds of research methods that are appropriate and assist in refining them in relation to a particular project. An important part of this work is training women in the development of methodology and in interviewing techniques and data collection.

The emphasis in our research approach is on developing a descriptive account of how a problem or issue is experienced by women as a basis for analysis and strategy development. This process contributes to the transformation of problems as personal or individual to the recognition of them as social, economic and political. Since women own and control the research they undertake with the Centre, they are able to use the information and analysis that is generated for future social or political action.

Projects are most often initiated at the request of women's groups themselves. In addition, the Centre also undertakes research which then involves or becomes of interest to other groups. The information resulting from our research—reports, papers, etc.—is distributed to women's groups and other interested organizations across Canada. In addition, this information is used by the Centre and other groups as a basis for developing and implementing workshops, seminars and consultations.

ASSUMPTIONS THAT DEFINE THE CENTRE'S WORK

Several assumptions define the Centre's approach to action research. The first assumption is obvious: ***social/political action is necessary to end women's oppression in Canadian society***. Second, experience demonstrates that the ***initiative for change in women's situations continues to come from women themselves***—particularly through community-based women's organizations focussed on women's concerns. In addition, it is clear to us that traditionally the majority of research and research methodologies has excluded women's perspectives and, therefore, ***it is necessary to develop methods, structures and research processes that will*** include ***women's perspectives.*** Further, the Centre operates from the assumption that ***an analysis of issues, based***

on a description of how those issues are actually experienced by women, is essential to the development of effective strategies for social/political action. Therefore, it is necessary to move beyond the usual preoccupation of research with theories of ***why*** a particular problem exists to the more practical work of discovering ***how*** a problem or issue is experienced by women and how it is perpetuated.

These assumptions are interconnected and they are critical to the Centre's work. We contend they are also central considerations in understanding the relationship between research and action.

ACTION IS NECESSARY TO END WOMEN'S OPPRESSION IN CANADIAN SOCIETY

One need only look at the issue of wife battering, and its effects on women, to recognize both the fact of women's oppression and the wide range of areas in which action is required to end women's oppression, as well as to improve our immediate situations.

The Women's Research Centre's extensive work on wife battering from the perspective of women has made visible several factors that are essential to an understanding of the issue.

Documenting battered women's situations, the circumstances and consequences of their husbands' violent assaults on them, provides a clear picture of what women's social and economic dependence on men actually means. It illuminates the ways in which the family as the smallest institutional unit in our society serves to maintain and enforce women's dependence and oppression. For example, our research ***descriptions*** revealed that the most prevalent factor evident in women's accounts of how the battering happened is the issue of men's authority—i.e. violence resulting from the husband's frustrated desire to exercise absolute control of her work in the home, caring for the children and maintaining the household, her social life and contacts through her family and/or her work outside the home. A woman's actual or perceived challenge to her husband's authority is often met by his violent assault.

The ***analysis*** we built from women's descriptions is that wife assault is a reality in our society because men have the socially ascribed authority to make the rules in marriage and because violence against their wives is accepted, in the eyes of society, as an appropriate instrument of control. The social and economic structure of marriage, as a "private" institution in which women are dependent on men, requires this assignment of authority to men.

Women's descriptive accounts also clarified that battered women try to stop the violence: they do not like to be beaten. However, women also try to meet the responsibility ascribed to women in our society to preserve their marriages and families, which means for many that they must not leave the battering situation. If battered women go for help to the health care, social welfare or legal systems, they come into conflict with institutional policies and practices which incorrectly treat

wife battering as a personal problem. The systems' responses serve to absolve men of their responsibility for their own behaviour and effectively reinforce the woman's entrapment in a violent environment.

In our analysis, institutional responses and existing Canadian economic policy and structure perpetuate the problem of wife battering. Changes are necessary in the institution of the family/ marriage, in the labour force, and in the legal, health care and social welfare systems. *In short, social and political action is essential on many fronts to deal not only with the immediate consequences of wife battering but to eradicate this most obvious case of women's oppression in our society.*

THE INITIATIVE FOR CHANGE IN WOMEN'S SITUATIONS CONTINUES TO COME FROM WOMEN

For almost 100 years, women's organizations in Canada have been involved in social and political action. Women's right to vote was an initial focus for women's groups. And legislative reform has been a continuing emphasis throughout this century—from the work of the earliest groups such as the National Council of Women and the Women's Institutes through to today's "status of women groups." However, in the 1960s and '70s, newly formed "Women's Liberation Groups" focussed on the need to develop an analysis of women's experience or what was called "the problem that has no name."

Out of the consciousness-raising and analytical work of these new community-based feminist groups, women developed new forms of social and political action. For example, in the area of alternative social services, women designed and implemented women's information and referral centres, rape crisis centres and transition houses; economic enterprises were undertaken such as women's credit unions, banks and bookstores; in the cultural area women's magazines, publishing houses, film, arts, and theatre groups were initiated; and in education, women's studies programs, women students' offices and counselling programs were developed. Feminist groups have continued to grow in numbers and diversity in all regions of Canada.

Today's groups have their roots in a century of women's groups' work. In spite of the undeniably positive impact of this work—most notably in the area of essential alternative services—the gains we have made are at risk. Many of the programs and policies necessary to women's rights and opportunities are recent and/or peripheral additions to Canada's social policy and institutions. As such, they can be more easily overlooked or rescinded than more entrenched programs and policies. Legislation, social services, and policies aimed at improving the status of women (and crucial to the majority of Canadian women) are directly or indirectly challenged by current economic restraints and re-evaluation of social policy. So, women must now define ways of maintaining previous gains while continuing to work for the change that is still necessary to improve women's lives.

Our history makes it clear that we have to face these problems ourselves: women's work has produced the improvements we experience today— the initiative came from us acting in our own best interests. ***There is no evidence that other groups or sectors of Canadian society will or can act as effectively on our behalf.***

THE NEED FOR RESEARCH THAT INCLUDES WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

The majority of research and research methodologies has excluded women's perspectives (for analysis of the practises of exclusion of women's perspectives in research, see the following papers prepared by Helga E. Jacobson and published by the Women's Research Centre: "How to Study Your Own Community;" "Women in Community Studies and Research;" and "Women's Perspective in Research."). Specifically, if we look at the traditional roles governing the organizing and producing of research, we see that people called "interviewers" are responsible for gathering information and the people who provide it are "respondents" or "informants."

However, on closer examination, we see that the view of the world that is commonly presented as society's view is really men's view—a view which excludes the picture of the world from women's perspective because traditionally, men have created, named, and defined the framework and rules for carrying out research.

But it is important to recognize that women are excluded from research frameworks not simply because men have created and defined those frameworks. The larger problem is that women are not acknowledged to be crucially involved in society, in all its organizational forms. Women are still seen primarily, if not only, in terms of our participation or involvement in the "private" or domestic sphere of the family or household. Our involvement in the "public world," in "men's world," and the wider society is largely invisible. To a great extent this stems from the lack of recognition of the family or household as an *economic* unit and of the work of the household as *work*. The sexual division of labour is not seen as a significant economic factor.

Women's exclusion from research, as well as from others of society's enterprises, is a product of this failure to see the sexual division of labour as significant. It follows that women's experience and work, defined within the household and domestic sphere, are seen as marginal at best. Further, the domestic sphere itself remains largely invisible and unexplored.

Therefore, it is essential to re-examine research frameworks (and economic frameworks as well) to provide an alternative that includes the perspective of women. Including women's perspectives must begin with validating and paying attention to what women have to say and the recognition that women's work and experience is relevant.

What is needed is a starting point that recognizes women as active participants, as actors in their own right. What follows from this are direct questions to them about their lives, their work, their concerns so that women will not be marginal in the research but will be, instead, the central focus.

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES BASED ON DESCRIPTIONS OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE IS ESSENTIAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

It seems obvious to those who are involved in organizing for political or social action that analysis is essential to the process of developing strategies for action. However, from women's perspective, existing theories and analyses are often inadequate: they are flawed by the lack of evidence or experience to substantiate them. Therefore, to inform strategies for action on women's issues it is necessary to bridge the gap between women's experience and the theories which seek to account for it. To do this requires beginning with women to describe and document our lives, our work, concerns and experience.

If the action strategies are to serve women's interests, then it is clear that research and analysis building must logically begin with women. Research that begins, for example, with institutional decision-makers and with their questions, concerns or experience will serve their interests.

We must ask the practical questions that will enable us to discover how a problem or issue is experienced by women and how the social relations and structures of society have impact on women's situations.

In addition to developing a more accurate and grounded analysis of women's concerns, doing this kind of research can also contribute to women's participation in political action strategies. Starting with descriptions of women's experience as we live it alters women's relationship to the research process; it de-mystifies research. The descriptive approach enables us to make visible what we as women already know; it transforms problems and experiences from personal or individual problems to political or social issues. Such research shows us new ways to take action grounded in a clearer understanding of women's concerns and enables us to develop strategies relevant to our own situations and context.

AN INTRODUCTION TO ACTION RESEARCH

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This kit provides a guide to action research for women's groups. It begins with a discussion of what research is and a description of action research using qualitative methods.

The second section of the kit outlines a process for making the decision whether or not to do a research project: the questions to ask and the steps to follow.

Next we outline how to design and carry out a research project, focusing on "how to" information such as: how to identify the research questions, how to set goals and objectives, how to develop a work plan and budget, how to collect information, and how to analyse the information.

In the final section of the kit, we deal with the uses of research findings including how to organize and write a research report and how to defend the research.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Action research: the systematic collection and analysis of information on a particular topic for the purpose of informing political action and social change.

Administer: to give to, to ask questions and record answers, usually in formal interviews, for a research project.

Aide Memoire: an aid to memory, a list of topics or issues to be covered in each interview for a specific research project (or for a specific part of a research project).

Assumptions: statements of those things taken to be true for the purpose of argument, investigation through the research process.

Bias: a distortion of research results by means of neglected or undeclared factors.

Data: the facts or information any particular situation affords or gives to an observer. Derived from *Practical Research—Planning and Design* by Paul D. Leedy, Washington D.C., 1980, p.71.

Informants: Those people who are interviewed (sometimes called interviewees) to provide information for a research project.

Interview Guide: a list or series of open-ended questions for interviewers to ask of informants in each interview for a specific research project or for a specific part of a research project.

Methodology: an operational framework or design or plan with specified rules and controls that govern the research process.

Objective: dealing with outward things, facts, uncoloured by feelings or opinion; distanced, external; without a point of view.

Qualitative approach: involves the collection of data or information (by means of open-ended interviews, participant observation, etc.) which will provide a description of the circumstances and conditions of the situation, community or problem as the primary basis for developing an analysis.

Quantitative approach: involves the collection of data or information (by means of questionnaires, structured interviews or counting) which will provide an account of the magnitude of the situation or problem based on numbers or statistics.

Questionnaire: a series of specific questions (often with a checklist of possible answers for the respondents to choose from) to be handed or mailed to respondents for them to answer on their own without the researcher being present.

Research: the systematic collection and analysis of information on a particular topic.

Respondents: those who answer or provide responses to questionnaires.

Sample: a separated part of a population, community, etc. selected to illustrate or exemplify the whole population, community, etc.

Statistics: information and meaning derived by counting the number of people holding similar views, having similar experience of a situation, problem, community, etc.

Survey: a general view, inspection or investigation of the condition, amount, etc. of something.

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

> Research is the systematic collection and analysis of information on a particular topic.

Research is the systematic collection and analysis of information on a particular topic. It's important to pay attention to the implications of this definition. The collection of information is not in itself research; rather the information must be collected *systematically*—that is, in an organized way according to a plan or design and specified procedures. In addition, to qualify as research the information must not only be collected systematically, it must also be *analysed*—that is, the information must be interpreted and related to the questions researchers identified about a particular topic. And the topic about which information is collected and analysed must be defined as specifically as possible.

For many people the word "research" conjures up images of scholars in ivory towers collecting statistics and "number crunching" and it suggests terms such as

surveys, questionnaires, control groups, random samples, and so on. It is commonly assumed that, to be good or credible, research must be quantitative—that is, it must be focussed or based on statistical data or numbers. While quantitative methods are often useful, they are *not* the only useful or credible methods.

A valuable and valid alternative or complement to quantitative methods is research which uses qualitative methods—that is, methods of collecting data and information to provide a ***description*** of the circumstances or conditions of a situation, problem, experience, society or culture. The end product of qualitative methods (using participant observation, open-ended interviews, etc.) is a coherent, internally consistent description which is recognizable both to the researcher and to the informants whose experience or situation is the subject of the research.

It is important to realize that some research methods will be more useful than others depending on such factors as why a group wants to do research, what kind of questions the research is intended to address, what overall strategy or action the research is meant to be a part of, and what financial (and other) resources are available.

HOW RESEARCH CAN BE USEFUL

> Research informs analysis and analysis informs action; but research is not a substitute for political action.

For women's organizations and others engaged in social change and political action, research can play a major positive role in building analysis to develop effective strategies. Research informs analysis, analysis informs action. Research can increase our understanding of an issue or problem; it can provide documentation to use in lobbying, advocacy and educational work; it can help to clarify which strategy or course of action is appropriate; and it can validate the experience of the people who live in the situation or are affected by the problem being studied or investigated.

However, research is not magic. No matter how extensive or persuasive a research report is, obviously it will not solve a problem or produce social change in and of itself. Research can be a valuable part of action strategies but it cannot replace the ongoing work of political action, organizing, lobbying, advocacy, and education.

In addition, it is clear that the majority of research and research methodologies has excluded women's perspectives and fails to acknowledge that women and men play different roles in the world, hold different positions, carry out different tasks, have different upbringings and different expectations. Women do not experience the world in the same way, nor do we understand it from the same perspective as men do. So, what we need to do as women and women's groups is to claim our own perspective

and speak our own experience. And we need to develop methods of doing research that will document and validate women's experience and inform our strategies to improve the social and economic conditions of women's lives.

A METHODOLOGY FOR ACTION RESEARCH

> Action research is the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of informing political action and social change.

Action research is the systematic collection and analysis of information to be used in working on political action or social change. At the Women's Research Centre, we've developed an approach to action research which addresses the problem of the exclusion of women from the majority of research and research methods. This process is tailored to women's groups' needs for research that will be useful in lobbying, advocacy, education, developing and running services, and taking the action necessary to improve women's situation.

The approach we use is a qualitative method. It is based on and derived from the participant observation techniques often used by anthropologists. Participant observation requires that the researcher interact in the community or situation that she is studying and with the people who are part of the community or situation. It requires, as the term suggests, both participation and observation.

Using this kind of qualitative method means the focus is on obtaining a description of *how* a problem or situation is experienced by the women who live it. Instead of starting with theories about the problem or situation and trying to fit women's experience into the theories, qualitative research starts with descriptions of women's actual experience as the basis for building analysis and taking action. Qualitative research is a way of grounding our analysis (and the action strategies we develop from our analysis) in real life and ensuring that the theories we develop have a basis in reality.

ACTION RESEARCH AND OBJECTIVITY

> Action research uses a researcher's interests and knowledge rather than denying they exist.

Participant observation uses the interests and knowledge a researcher brings to the research—rather than denying that she has any interests or knowledge or pretending that she can suspend the interests or knowledge she has. This methodology challenges the assumption of objectivity. It recognizes that there is no way of entering a situation or doing research as if one had just dropped in from Mars and had no connection with humanity in any form.

Objectivity is defined as a distanced, external view, a view "uncoloured by feelings or opinions." Taken to its logical conclusion, it is the absence of a point of view. Objectivity is commonly considered to be a pre-requisite for good research. Unless researchers are objective and anonymous, it is assumed the research will be biased. But we contend that everyone—even a researcher—has a point of view, feelings and opinions that are difficult, if not impossible to set aside. And if we accept the Oxford dictionary definition of bias as "distortion of result by neglected factor," then ignoring the researchers' point of view and opinions or their influence is neglecting an important factor in the research process.

It follows that if a researcher pretends to be distanced and does not declare her assumptions and opinions, she is more likely to produce biased research. Stating one's assumptions and opinions and recognizing them as part of what defines the research project means that the assumptions and opinions can be tested throughout the research and the audience reading a report on the research can make an informed judgement about what factors influenced the research.

For women's groups, this method—making it clear that the researchers' assumptions and knowledge are a declared factor in the research—makes it possible to acknowledge that the women who are working to bring about change or to deliver a service often share the interests and problems of the women they work with and for. They have knowledge that is valuable in defining and carrying out research on women's issues and concerns.

THE RULES FOR DOING ACTION RESEARCH

Action research usually uses small scale intensive interviews which are always carried out systematically. As in all research, all stages of the action research process are rationalized, justified and documented.

Action research that is qualitative and descriptive does not focus on statistics—though numerical or statistical data may be part of the research—and does not rely on the rules of sampling, surveys, and control groups.

The rules of action research require the *development of a research design* which defines and delineates systematically the areas the research will focus on, the questions which will be addressed, and who and what will be included and excluded, with reasons for both inclusion and exclusion. *All stages in the research process are rationalized, justified and documented.* Finally, *in reporting the results of the research care must be taken to report informants' accounts accurately* without making claims or generalizations that the informants represent the whole population, all women or everyone in the community or situation that was investigated.

The approach we are describing most commonly uses small scale, intensive, open-ended interviews governed by an interview guide or an aide memoire which lists the questions or topics interviewers will cover in order to obtain information from interviewees or informants. The interview guide or aide memoire is a control which provides for comparability between interviews by ensuring the researchers ask the same questions or cover the same topics in each interview.

The research is small scale in that it generally involves a small number of informants. For example, for WRC projects the research population is usually less than one hundred and, on average, thirty informants. The interviews are intensive in that each informant, in a one and a half to two hour interview, is asked questions designed to provide a detailed, descriptive account of her experience and understanding of the problem or situation being investigated. Informants are selected according to their location in or experience of a particular community, problem, workplace, etc. For example, in research to learn about wife battering and the effectiveness of transition house in meeting battered women's crisis needs, informants would logically be battered women who had stayed at the transition house during a specified period. Interviewing informants selected by these criteria provides descriptions that expand our knowledge beyond the limits set by the small numbers of informants.

THE ADVANTAGES OF ACTION RESEARCH

> Action research approaches provide a significant step towards the inclusion of women's perspective.

Action research using qualitative methods is particularly well suited to research by women's groups. Asking women for accounts of their lives, interviewing women about their experience gives the informants, as well as the researchers, an opportunity to increase their understanding through their very participation in the interviews. This is especially important given that as women all too frequently we have little control of our own lives and do not see ourselves as even being justified in presenting information about our lives or work. In fact, a first task in interviewing is often to persuade women that their accounts of their own situations are valid and that they, therefore, create a basis for understanding a problem or community. Since women are usually excluded from the definition and control of research (and of knowledge itself), this research approach can be a significant step towards the inclusion of women's perspective. It validates women's views of the world, women's understanding of it, women's right to be listened to and believed and understood rather than ignoring or trivializing women's perspective.

The action research approach we've outlined is also appropriate to women's groups with limited resources in that it is relatively inexpensive. The research can be carried out by women's groups themselves. It doesn't depend on outside experts, expensive computer time or elaborate research instruments. And finally, this method not only allows for but facilitates direct contact between the researcher(s) and the women experiencing the problem or situation being investigated which isn't the case with mail out questionnaires, surveys, and so on. Therefore, the research process lends itself to potential involvement in the group's ongoing work by the women interviewed and, thus, can broaden the group's base for future action.

SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW ACTION RESEARCH WORKS

> Action research documents women's perspective on their community or group or on an issue women are concerned about. It prepares for lobbying, etc. and can be used to improve services, programs, etc.

In the 1970s women's groups in northern B.C. and the Yukon realized that the federal government's plans to construct a gas pipeline could have an enormous impact on the lives of women living in communities along its route. Women's groups were concerned about the possible impact and wanted to make sure that if the pipeline was built, its impact on women would be taken into account by the people responsible for building it. Women's groups decided they had to do some investigation and inform themselves about what the pipeline would mean to their communities, and particularly to women, so they'd be able to participate in pipeline discussions and try to ensure that women would not suffer unduly as a result of the proposed pipeline. They decided to do a research project focussed on interviewing women to document women's perspective on their communities and women's concerns about the effects the pipeline would have. They used the results of the research to make presentations at socio-economic impact assessment hearings, to lobby for services to help women cope with the disruption in their communities the pipeline would bring, and to do education with women and with decision-makers about economic development and women's right to be involved in decision-making.

Similarly, when women began telling transition house and rape crisis workers that they and/or their children had been sexually abused, it became clear that child sexual abuse was a "new" issue we had to learn more about. Workers began to pay more attention to the issue and some set about to do research to document women's accounts of child sexual abuse so they could develop or advocate programs and services, such as support groups and counselling, which would speak to women's actual experience of child sexual abuse.

A women's group which notices that its membership is declining or the women it wants to reach are not participating in the programs the group offers, can develop a research project to determine what it can do about the problem. By systematically asking the women in the group or in the community what their concerns are, what issues/problems affect them, how they use or relate to the group's programs or services, what would help them to deal with the problems they face, etc., the group can obtain information to use in planning future work, in developing new programs or services, and in explaining or rationalizing its work both inside the group as well as to the community or to funders.

From these examples it's possible to summarize some of the reasons for deciding to do an action research project using qualitative methods and what some of the practical benefits can be:

1. action is required; research (the systematic collection and analysis of information) would help to inform the action
2. we need to understand issue "X" better in order to act on it; no research is available on the particular issue or problem
3. "new" issue has come to our attention; existing research is inadequate/incomplete; existing research doesn't include women's experience; existing research doesn't reflect women's actual experience
4. women's needs are not being met; new programs, services, etc. are needed; research can document women's needs and provide insights into what programs, services would be appropriate

MAKING THE DECISION TO DO A RESEARCH PROJECT

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HOW TO BEGIN

> Clarify what your questions are and how to answer them; don't jump to the conclusion that you need to do a formal research project.

Research begins with a question: Why does a particular situation or problem exist? What does it mean? What are the implications for me, for us? How can we deal with the problem or situation? Do we have the information we need to make a decision, take action, etc?

Getting answers to questions like these does not necessarily require doing a research project.

Research is the systematic collection and analysis of information. Most of us in our daily lives do what could be called informal research to help us make decisions about such things as which products to buy, what's expected of us in dealing with a government agency (eg. Unemployment Insurance Commission, Welfare Offices, etc.), where to go for a holiday, which child care program is best for our children, which doctor to see, and so on. In addition, most women's groups in preparing briefs for lobbying or reports for funders, for example, have to collect and analyse information. We set out to collect the facts we need, to put together what we already know with what's been said or written about the topic we're concerned about and we sort this information in order to come to a decision or draw conclusions.

It's useful to recognize that through our life experience and work most of us have acquired some skills in research or fact finding and to realize that we have some familiarity with what's involved in the research process even if we haven't had specific training or experience as researchers.

However, a formal research project is different from informal research. Although all research starts with a question and involves the collection and analysis of information, a formal research project is governed by a set of rules and controls such as an overall plan or research design and a methodology to ensure that information is collected systematically (rather than in an ad hoc fashion), with prescribed questions for particular informants or information sources selected according to specified criteria.

Rather than jumping to the conclusion that a formal research project with the necessary controls and rules is required to address the questions and information needs you have, it's important to clarify first what the questions are, what information you really need, how you can get that information, and what you'd do with it.

START WITH YOURSELF, TALK WITH OTHERS

> **Start with yourself, the question(s) you have, your own experience of the problem or situation that prompted the question(s). Talk with others who might share your concerns; piece together what you already know and identify specific questions you want to answer.**

To illustrate the process of making the decision to do a research project, let's look at a variety of situations.

For example, if you're a member of a women's group you could well have questions rising from your work or participation in the group. You may want to know more about how women experience a "new" issue the women you're working with have brought to your attention. You may want to find a way of determining what the effects of a particular government policy will be. Or you may have questions about why women are not responding as you'd expected they would to your group's programs.

If you're not currently in an organized women's group, you may have questions that arise out of your experience in your workplace or in your neighbourhood or community. For example, if you find that a decision made in your workplace without your input is going to make your work or working conditions more difficult, you may question what you can do to change the specific decision or how you can participate in such decisions in the future. If you're the mother of a new-born baby, you may question what support systems there are in your community to help women cope with caring for their children, and if there aren't any, to explore ways to bring your concerns to the attention of groups or agencies who can do something about them. Or as a new resident in a neighbourhood, perhaps you see a need for more public transit or better street lighting and wonder what you can do about these issues.

Whether you're in an organized group or not, the first step in dealing with your questions is to start with yourself and some of the women you know who might share your concerns or experience. You can begin by getting a group together to talk about the problem or concern. Even two or three of you can meet to exchange information and opinions, discuss the issues, identify some specific questions and piece together what you already know about the situation. It might help for each of you to write down your experience and thoughts and then compare notes.

STARTING THE INVESTIGATION

> Do some research at libraries, colleges, universities, government offices, groups in your community, etc. to see what information you can obtain to meet your needs; identify gaps in information or information you can't get. Are other groups/agencies addressing your concerns?

Perhaps you can make some preliminary investigations—such as getting information from the local library or educational institution or government office or other groups or individuals in the area. This initial fact finding or informal research can help you to clarify the questions you started with, and indicate whether others share your concerns. You may find that you can easily get the information or resources you need from your own or another group to develop an action plan or strategy to deal with your concerns. Or you may find your list of questions is growing and answers are not readily available. If this is the case, it's probably time to take a more systematic approach which *may* lead to a decision to do a research project.

ASSESS YOUR QUESTIONS AND INFORMATION

> Assess whether you have enough information to act on the concerns or to convince/encourage others to act on them or whether you need to develop a more systematic approach to information collection.

Draw up a list of the questions you have now (preferably on a piece of flip chart paper so everyone can see them) and review them. For each of your questions ask yourselves the following (and record the answers):

- what information have we been able to get so far? how does it meet our needs? where are the gaps? what's missing? why—i.e. what ideas do we have to account for the inadequacy of the available information?
- where can we go to get the additional information we need? what other groups/agencies/individuals are addressing our concerns?
- what do we have to do to get the information? what resources would we need (time, people, money, skills, etc.) what resources do we have?

- what would we do with the information if we could get it? how could we use it? what does that tell us about the kind of information we need and how much information we need?

- do we have a base, a starting place both to get the information and to make use of it? If not, who else should we talk to about taking this on or working with us?

Answering these questions will help you to clarify what, if anything, you need to do next. If you decide that you will continue to collect information, the answers to these questions provide insights into what would be involved and a reference point for deciding later on whether you've accomplished what you set out to do or should keep going.

HOW TO MAKE THE DECISION TO DO RESEARCH

> Is a research project really what you need to do? Why? Are you the ones to do it? Why? Do you have (or can you get) the resources you need to carry it out? How would you use the results of the research project? Be specific.

The following chart provides some examples of how the process of making the decision about whether or not to do research might work in different situations.

Situation	Concerns	Questions	Research Decision
1. Workers at a transition house realize that they're hearing more from residents about child sexual abuse.	(a) Workers need to know more about child sexual abuse to be effective in working with residents. (b) There aren't good programs, counsellors, etc. to refer residents or workers to. (c) Existing research, programs, policies, attitudes re: child sexual abuse don't seem to reflect what women at the transition house are saying is their experience.	• How can workers get the information and analysis they need? —is there a training program/course on child sexual abuse workers can take?	if yes,— no apparent need for research project
		—are there counsellors, consultants, workers can refer to or call in to help?	if yes,— no apparent need for research project
		—what research on child sexual abuse exists? is it useful? does it reflect the experience residents are describing to the workers?	if yes,— no apparent need for research project
		—would documenting and analysing women's experience (e.g. residents' experience) of child sexual abuse provide a basis for transition house workers to negotiate or lobby for or do educational training to develop or change policies, practices, attitudes re: child sexual abuse. if yes, is transition house the group to do it? why, why not? does transition house have the resources, time, money, etc.?	if yes,— consider doing a research project
2. Government announces decision to put money into a new industry or economic development project in our community.	(a) Women's group in the community is concerned about the impact on the community and on women in particular. (b) Women's group should make presentation to government. (c) Women's group needs information on impact on women to develop new programs to meet women's needs in changing community.	• How can women's group try to make sure the government takes into account the potential impact on women? —is government going to hold community hearings? if not, can the group lobby for hearings to be held? —if hearings will be held, does group have enough information to make a presentation re: impact on women? and/or will other groups in the community address this concern? can group use existing research for presentation?	if yes,— no apparent need for research project
		—if no, would interviews with women in the community help the group in assessing what the impact will be for a presentation to the hearings? would documenting women's needs and concerns help the group in developing its programs for the future? is this the group to do it?	if yes,— consider doing a research project

3. Women's centre or status of women group experiences decline in membership; women are not participating in programs group offers.	Group needs to know why.	• Why does this situation exist? —does group have information/feedback from women to account for the problem? if yes, collect and analyse the information.	—no apparent need for research project
		—if no information/feedback available, can group design a way of getting it easily as part of ongoing work?	if yes,— no apparent need for research project
		—if no information is available or cannot be obtained as part of the group's ongoing work,	—consider doing a research project
4. Women in workplace identify problem of lack of participation in decision-making re: working conditions.	(a) Workers want to bring their concerns to the attention of decision-makers. (b) Workers want to develop a practical way to ensure their own and other workers' participation on an ongoing basis.	• How can we change the situation? —do we have information on how decisions are currently made? by whom? why? what is the decision-making structure? if there's a union, what role can it play? if information is available, how can we act on it? collect and analyse information to develop strategy and action plan; identify sources of support, etc.	—no apparent need for research project
		—if information is not available, how can we get it? by describing what we already know and adding other worker's accounts? what use can we make of the information? what kind of information will be effective in accomplishing our short-term goals? our longer term goals? can information describing our working conditions be useful in involving other workers in the effort to change decision-making practices? do we have the resources/support we need to collect and analyse the information?	if yes,— consider doing a research project

5. Women in community identify the need for better housing (more affordable, better quality, etc.).	(a) Women can't find the housing they need. (b) Community groups and agencies don't seem to consider housing a priority issue	• What can we do to deal with this problem? —do we have information on what the problem is? who it affects most, why it's a concern for women in particular? does any other group have this information? has research been done on this problem? is the existing research adequate to our situation and needs? can we use existing information to develop strategies?	if yes,— no apparent need for research project
		—if information doesn't exist, how can we get it? how would we use it? are there other groups we can work with to get the information and/or act on it? can we find the resource to collect and analyse the information we need?	if yes, —consider doing a research project

SUMMARY

Research is not an end in itself but a strategy or tool you may choose to use to help you in your everyday work.

If the process we've outlined here leads to a decision to do a formal research project, the preparations you've done through this process means you can begin the project with a rationale and a grounding rather than rushing into it unprepared. Instead of falling prey to the myths or mystique that so often surround the idea of doing research—eg. that "research is always a good thing to do" or "we can't do research because we don't know how to conduct a survey" or "research is just a way to avoid taking action"...—you can cut through the myths and mystique and tailor research to relate to your needs and circumstances.

It's important to remember that for a women's group—including an "ad hoc" group of women who've come together to explore a problem in their workplace or community—the decision to do research usually emerges out of everyday work with the women who are members of the group or who participate in or use the group's programs or services. The research question for women's groups is rarely "does a problem exist?"—we identify the problem by listening to and believing the women we're working with. Instead the research question is more likely: What action can/should we take to deal with this problem women are experiencing. We may need to understand the problem better, to learn more about women's experience of it, in order to take effective action. We may need to examine how other groups or agencies and institutions are addressing the problem in order to work towards making legislation, attitudes, policies or practices reflect women's actual experience. In some cases women's groups need to do research to document women's experience for use in briefs or presentations to government bodies which are or should be addressing the problem. In other cases, we need to understand how women are experiencing a problem in order to change our own programs, services, structure or operation to better meet the needs of the women who belong to or come to our organization.

In short, we should ***decide to do research when action is required and research is needed to inform the action.*** You should not undertake research simply out of curiosity about a problem or issue or with illusions that research by itself can solve problems, but out of a need for information and analysis that is practical and that we can *use* to make our work and actions more effective. Research is *not* an end in itself but a tool or a strategy women's groups can use in our everyday work with and for women.

To conclude, the decision to do a research project should be made after careful consideration of the following questions:

1. Is a research project really what we need to do? Is research what's needed? Why?
2. Is ours the group that should do this project? Why?—ie. do we have access to information/sources/informants through our group that others lack? Do we have a particular perspective or experience that equips us to do the project? Is another group/agency in a better position to do the research?
3. Do we have or can we get the resources we need to do the research project—be specific.
4. How will we use the research project to accomplish our goals (short-term or long-term)? How will it fit into our ongoing work?

DESIGNING AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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This paper is one of a six part kit on Action Research. The other five are:

I. **THE WOMEN'S RESEARCH CENTRE AND OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH**
II. **AN INTRODUCTION TO ACTION RESEARCH**
III. **MAKING THE DECISION TO DO A RESEARCH PROJECT**
V. **CARRYING OUT AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT**
VI. **COMMUNICATING THE FINDINGS OF AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT**

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WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DESIGNING AND CARRYING OUT THE RESEARCH?

> Whose research project is this? What will be the decision-making structure of the project?

The first step in designing a research project is deciding who will do it. Who will be responsible for planning the research and carrying it out? Whose research project is this? What will be the decision-making structure of the project?

If you are a group of individuals from a specific community or workplace who have decided to work together to investigate questions of common concern, you can simply designate yourselves as "a research committee" and begin the process of designing the research project. You will have to make decisions and come to agreements about how the work will be done. It will help to write up these decisions and agreements for all of the individuals in the group to use as "terms of reference" or guidelines throughout the project so that everyone involved understands the decision-making process of the work and what to do to deal with any problems that arise. In putting the design together you may also identify other people or organizations from your community or workplace you need to involve in carrying out the project.

Should you decide to involve anyone else—either at the beginning of the project or during the course of it—you will have to work out their relationship to the project and its decision-making structure. You can use the terms of reference to do this and, if necessary, agree to change them to suit the new circumstances of the project. Be sure to record any changes you make in the terms of reference so the decision-making process is clear to everyone involved throughout the project.

If the idea of doing a research project has been developed by some (but not all) members of a women's group, responsibility for actually designing the research will depend on whether the group as a whole supports the research project and how the research will fit into the group's ongoing work.

Perhaps the group has policy that covers how to make decisions on projects suggested by its members. If not, it will be necessary to develop and follow a process to ensure that the research project is understood and supported by the group. If the group as a whole has doubts about the need for the project or suggestions about other issues the project should address, it's better to know that before proceeding to form a research committee and design the research. Write down and circulate to the group a written description of the reasons behind the research project idea—including the questions the research would address and an account of any preliminary investigation on initial information gathering that's been done. This can form the basis for deciding how to proceed.

Assuming that the group as a whole endorses the idea of the research project there are two key questions to consider:

1. *Who will be responsible for designing and carrying out the research project?*
   The research committee for the project should include those women from the group who have information that will be useful to the research project and who are involved in those parts of the group's work that will be affected by the research. In addition, the research committee should include a representative or two from among those who are responsible for the overall direction of the group's work (eg. from the Board of the Collective; the co-ordinator or director, etc., depending on the group's structure) to ensure that the research project and its results can be integrated into the group's ongoing work. Since it is usually most efficient to have a relatively small research committee—six or eight members—the group may have to set some criteria for membership on the committee. If researchers from outside the committee are hired for the project, they should, of course, be added to the committee so keep this possibility in mind when you're setting up a committee. Also remember that in designing the research, you many identify other individuals who should be involved in the research committee.

2. *What will be the decision-making structure for the research project?*
   A clear decision-making structure is essential to the effectiveness of any project. In the case of a research project with the potential for disagreements about what methodology is best, where information can best be obtained, etc., it is especially important to spell out clearly who has the authority to make decisions. The research committee should have enough autonomy to get on with its work but the group as a whole should receive regular reports on the progress of the research project. Perhaps research committee minutes can be circulated to Board/Collective/staff meetings as reports. Within the relatively small research committee we recommend, decision-making by consensus should be possible and effective. However, whatever decision-making and reporting procedures you agree on should be spelled out for the information of everyone involved. In addition, if the research project requests and receives funding, someone from the research committee should be designated as a liaison between the project and the funder with clear guidelines about reporting.

   Here is an example of terms of reference for a research committee:

   1. To design and carry out the research project.
   2. To monitor the overall research process and modify as necessary.
   3. To review, analyse and discuss data and findings arising from the research.
   4. To be the "official" information link between the research project and the group (collective, board, staff, funder(s), etc.)

5. To hold meetings of the research committee each month at a mutually agreed, pre-arranged time—with additional or special meetings to be arranged as circumstances require.
6. To make decisions in the research committee by consensus or...
7. The research committee will consist of...

WHAT DO YOU WANT AND NEED TO KNOW?

> This is the most important question—if you are not clear about what you need to know, then everything else will also be unclear—including the end product. List everything you think you need to know; clarify by asking "*why* do we need to know this?"; then begin a process of eliminating and refining until you are all satisfied with the research questions.

An important part of beginning a research project is ensuring that you are clear about what you want and need to know from the research. We recommend several exercises designed to help a group clarify:

1. what it wants and needs to know
2. what its assumptions are
3. what the context of the research is, and
4. what the goals and objectives of the research are.

Doing each of these exercises gets all your ideas out of your head and onto paper—visible to yourself and everyone else involved and makes it possible to work together to shape the research.

Asking "what do we want and need to know?" leads to a list of research questions that you can refine until everyone is satisfied. Then participants can list, clarify and modify their own assumptions about the research and the research questions and describe the context of the research project. *At that point, and at that point only,* it is possible for the participants to write specific research goals and objectives. A particularly important benefit of having clear goals and objectives in place is that you can then develop a realistic work plan to ensure an even workflow and a useful evaluation of the research process when it is complete.

The amount of time it takes to complete these exercises will vary depending on the size of the research project and the number of participants. It is best to set aside at least an hour and a half to two hours for each of the exercises.

Start by writing the question "what do we want and need to know?" on a piece of flip chart paper or some newsprint on the wall. List everyone's answers to that question. Include all ideas even if they seem off track, widely varying or even contradictory from one another as this exercise is meant to give participants the opportunity to develop and sort out different ideas. Also, remember that most research ideas arise not from a vacuum but from people's thoughts and actual experience so it is extremely likely those of you involved in this research *already know* many things. List the things you already know on another sheet of paper, and answer the question "how do we know this?" Aside from affirming that you have some information with which to begin, these points can provide early direction to the work.

As an example look at the following lists of the "what do we want and need to know?" points from a Women's Research Centre project on the relation between women and the economy and from a hypothetical research project being considered by a community women's centre.

Women and economy project: what do we want and need to know

- How do women experience the impact of social service cutbacks in their work in the home, community and labour force?
- What kind of work, if any, are women finding during recessionary times?
- Where do people go when services get cut back?
- How can we make visible the impact of women's work on the economy?
- How can we make visible the impact of economic decisions on all aspects of women's work and lives?

Anytown Women's Centre—what do we want and need to know

- Why do women come to us?
- What other services are women using in our community?
- How can we most effectively educate community agencies about women's issues?
- How do women find out about us?
- What gaps do women experience in the services offered by the women's centre?
- What gaps do women experience in the services offered by other community agencies?

Next, clarify these questions by asking "*why* do we want and need to know this?" and writing down the answers. This provides the first opportunity to check on the real necessity for finding out certain things and allows you to describe the overall reasons why the topic needs to be researched.

The Women's Research Centre economic project responses to the question *why*? included "we know that women carry an extra load during a 'boom'? is it the same

during a 'bust'?," "women's work, especially the work in the home, is invisible and we want to make it visible."

Some responses of a women's centre to "why do we need to know this" might be: "we need to check that what we're doing is relevant to women in our community" or "we want information for educating agency people in our community," or "we want to improve the services and programs we provide."

Once you've has done this clarifying, leave these lists up on the wall without further refining and move on to the next step.

WHAT ASSUMPTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THIS RESEARCH TOPIC?

> List the assumptions (statements of belief), that you hold about the topic being researched. Discuss everyone's assumptions until a set of research assumptions is agreed upon.

Assumptions are what the researcher takes for granted. However taking things for granted may cause misunderstanding because what one person assumes, another may never have thought of. If one of you acts on your assumption and in the final result such action makes a big difference in the outcome, you and the group may face a situation you are unprepared to accept. ***Therefore, for each of us to know what is assumed is basic to a course of action.*** If we know the assumptions we all have about the topic we are researching, we are then better prepared to evaluate the conclusions that result from those assumptions. To many of us the stating of assumptions may be a matter of stating the obvious, but because in research we try to leave nothing to chance in the hope of preventing any misunderstanding, all assumptions you have that relate to the research topic should be openly stated. (Adapted from *Practical Research—Planning and Design*, Paul D. Leedy, Washington, D.C., 1980)

Using the "what do we want to know" discussion as a stimulus, ask everyone to state their assumptions—what they consider to be true about the topic. List these on another large piece of paper on the wall. Talk about the assumptions. Ask questions of one another to clarify understanding. Discuss, debate and modify the assumptions in order to come to a set of research assumptions that everyone is comfortable with.

It is important to understand that having a list of assumptions about the research does nct mean the research has to prove these assumptions to be right, or that the research is bad if it doesn't match the assumptions. What the research will do is inform you, one way or another, about your assumptions.

The value of this exercise is its formal recognition that everyone's understanding and analysis of the topic comes from a different place. There's no sense pretending we have no preconceived notions about the topic at hand because we all do.

Objectivity is one of the largest myths that exists in research. It is important and useful for all of you who are working together on a research project to state your assumptions in order to avoid hidden agendas, to spot areas of agreement and disagreement, and to develop ways of working together effectively.

If the exercise of declaring assumptions reveals disagreements about participants beliefs about this work or their reasons for wanting to do it, which can occur sometimes, then this is an early opportunity for the group to consider revisions of the research or for individuals to reconsider their involvement in the work at all. You may decide to narrow or broaden the focus of the research or discuss whether or not the project should go ahead. No matter what you decide, it is much better for the work and workers when important adjustments such as this happen earlier rather than later.

Some of the research assumptions we made for the Women and Economy project referred to earlier included:

- that in these recessionary times women in the family and household are having to take on more responsibility in and out of the home for the care of the family
- that the people involved in economic debate have always omitted the topic of women's work in the home
- that economic restraint has a detrimental effect on children, specifically regarding health, education, social services and their future
- that economic restraint has a negative emotional impact on some people
- that during this period of recession women are getting and keeping part time jobs, men get fewer full time jobs

To continue the example of the Anytown Women's Centre, the research assumptions for that research project might include:

- the experience of isolation of women working in the home is not seen by other community agencies
- if there was more childcare women would take advantage of community services and education opportunities
- the hours our Women's Centre is open make it difficult for women in the labour force to drop in and find out about our services
- our community needs the perspective and services offered by our women's centre

WHAT IS THE CONTEXT OF YOUR WORK?

> Describe conditions such as the local economy, political climate, your group, etc. to help identify areas of potential influence on your group and the research work.

As part of the process of declaring what you already know, what your assumptions are *before* you collect and analyse the information for the research project, it's useful to describe the context of your work.

The research project you're doing and its planning does not take place in a vacuum, divorced from other events in your group or community or workplace. Indeed part of your reason for deciding to do a research project in the first place might be the need to change or influence the world you live in. Therefore, in designing your research project (and in writing it up later and in evaluating its effectiveness) it's important to be clear about where you're starting from, the conditions that influence you, the research project, and the questions you're asking.

Begin by considering the context or environment your group is working in. Record what you know about the context on a piece of flip chart paper so everyone in the research committee can add their knowledge and comments and you can produce a sketch of where you're starting from.

The following list can be a guide but amend it or add to it to reflect your own situation:

- *Characteristics of the community:* size, geographical location, population/how many people?
- *your own group:* where/how does it fit in the community? what issues is your group addressing that affect the rest of the community? what's the community's response?
- *social services, housing, health care:* what's available? at what cost? what's good about each one? what are the problems? are there special programs or services for women? are there professionals who are sympathetic to women's concerns?
- *economic situation:* jobs, business, unions, working conditions, what's the situation for women in your group? what's the situation generally for women in the community?
- *political climate:* politicians, boards, political parties, levels of government. how supportive are they of the concerns you've identified? how do their policies affect you/your concerns?

- *media:* how are the issues you're concerned about covered? how are women's issues generally covered? are there any helpful journalists? what are the problem areas regarding coverage of the issues you've identified?
- *funding sources:* is local, provincial, regional, federal funding available? accessible? how receptive are funders to the issues you're concerned about?

Review your list of questions and answers and ask yourselves what the implications might be for the research project you're designing. What effect do you think the context of your research might have on the questions you've identified, on where you can get information, and what you might be able to do with the results of your research? Record your answers to these questions for future reference. When you've collected and analysed the information in this research project you can come back to this sketch of the community and add to it what you've learned. If you're writing a report on the research, you will want to include this context description.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH?

> Goals are general overall statements about what the research intends to accomplish. Objectives are specific statements about what you want to accomplish by a given point in time.

Goals are general overall statements about what the research intends to accomplish. Most research projects will have two to four goals. Objectives are specific measurable statements of what work is to be accomplished within a given period of time. Research objectives describe what the research work is actually about and most projects have three to six objectives.

To identify the *goals* for your research project, begin by reviewing the lists of "what do we want and need to know?" Look for statements that are similar in meaning, group them together and write new statements that more effectively and completely include them. When this is done some overall themes will become visible. Start to group the themes, make decisions about which could or should be eliminated, which should be woven together, which should stand alone. Use the list of agreed upon assumptions to help in the discussion.

Go through the lists again to set priorities: which themes or points appear most important or useful for development of a cohesive research project. Now you can eliminate points that do not fit into the overall shape that is be emerging—things that simply won't get done, things the group doesn't need or want to do right now, or things that will take too much time. Using the refined list, start to write some research goals and objectives.

The overall goals (general statements about what the research intends to accomplish) of the Women and Economy project were as follows:

- to understand what's going on with women in the present B.C. economy
- to inform women
- to get women's perspective into the current debate about the B.C. economy
- to generalize B.C. women's economic issues to the Canadian picture

The Anytown Women's Centre research goals might be:

- to understand the overall status of women oriented needs of women in our community
- to make visible the status of women related concerns of Anytown women

Now you can get more specific about the work you want to complete by a given point in time by writing some research *objectives*. This will force you to be exact about what you want and need to do in the research and help you avoid taking on unfocussed work. The number of objectives a project has depends on the scope of the work and the time available to do it in.

The Women and Economy project objectives were as follows:

- to assess the impact of restraint on women and their families in B.C.
- to assess the impact of the recession on women and their families in BC
- to clarify the WRC perspective on women and economy issues
- to inform women of our findings in a manner useful to their work

The Anytown Women's Centre research objectives could be:

- to describe the "status of women" related concerns of women in Anytown
- to examine the appropriateness and effectiveness of past and present Women's Centre program and services to Anytown women
- to develop models of Women's Centre program and service delivery useful to Anytown women
- to share our research findings with community women
- to share our research findings with other agencies and organizations concerned about Anytown women

In conclusion, these exercises—asking "what do we want and need to know," clarifying assumptions about the research, identifying the context of your work, and writing research goals and objectives, will inform you about the shape your research project should take at this early stage, and will continue to provide a useful reference

point to come back to at later stages of the work. For example, the decisions you have to make about how to gather data will make use of the "want and need to know" listings; the data analysis stage requires that you review and incorporate the assumptions and goals/objectives into the analysis of your findings; and decisions about the design and distribution of the final report depend on the specific objectives you've written about that.

WHAT IS YOUR WORK PLAN?

> What tasks do you have to do to meet the objectives for the project? when do you have to do them? who will do which tasks? from the answers to these questions, develop a picture of the project with a clear time line.

It is absolutely imperative that you develop a work plan with a time line at an early stage in the research project—preferably after you have written the research goals and objectives and before you have developed research instruments. Since the work plan process provides information critical to the research budget, you should develop the work plan before applying for funding.

A work plan is a way of organizing all the tasks you have to complete to meet your objectives. It's a map of how to get to where you need to be at the end of the research project or at the end of each phase of the research, if your project consists of several phases.

Doing a work plan will provide you with a reference point to guide you through the research project. If you encounter unavoidable delays at some point (for example, if an interviewer gets sick or funding for some part of the work arrives late), you can use the work plan to figure out how to deal with the problem. Doing a work plan will increase your confidence about the project. You'll be able to see from the work plan that you can focus on task "X" now without worrying about when you'll even get to task "Y" and so on. A work plan makes the research project manageable and makes the work clear and visible to everyone involved.

One method of developing a work plan is a PERT Chart (Program Evaluation and Review Technique—derived from *Hip Pocket Guide to Planning and Evaluation*, by Dorothy Craig, 1978). A complete PERT chart is particularly useful for projects that involve co-operation by members of a group in accomplishing several different objectives. There are a couple of stages to developing a useful and effective work plan. In Stage One you need to develop a total picture of what has to be done to meet the research objectives. Stage Two breaks down, re-orders and puts into sequence these tasks. The process described here will take two to three hours to complete.

Stage One: developing a picture of what has to be done

Put a piece of flip chart paper on the wall with the following column headings written across the top:

- Objectives
- What we need to know
- How to find out
- Resources we have (people, info, etc)
- Resources we need

Start by writing the research objectives on this chart, one at a time, and filling in the rest of the chart's columns. Be as specific as you can. Include all details.

Stage Two: designing the work plan using the PERT chart method (Program Evaluation Review Technique)

Break total work into tasks:

Using the information in the chart you've just developed, list all the separate tasks that have to be done to complete the work. Don't try to put them in chronological order yet, just list them. Be sure to include items like "typing report," "designing research tool," "reading relevant literature," "writing up interviews," etc. This will be a long list and must include everything that is a piece of work and takes time.

Put tasks in chronological order:

When you've finished this list, put it in order by identifying the tasks that need to be done first and putting letter A beside those items. Put the letter B beside the group of tasks that seem to follow after the A tasks. Continue to do this grouping of tasks until you've reached the end point of the project. You'll notice some overlap between task groupings and you'll also have some tasks that repeat themselves throughout the project (like "research committee meets")—that's normal.

Next, go through those sets of grouped task listings and number each set in *chronological* order. Make a fresh list of these - A1, A2, B1, B2, B3, B4, C1, C2, C3, D1 etc.

A's	B's	C's
A-1	B-1	C-1
A-2	B-2	C-2
A-3	B-3	C-3
A-4	B-4	C-4
A-5		

Chart the tasks:

Now you can begin to draw an actual chart of the work. Start by taping several large pieces of flip chart paper on the wall. Begin at the far right edge of the paper by writing the *end point* you want to reach. Then, looking at your list of chronologically ordered tasks, find the *step that needs to be completed immediately prior to the end point being reached.* Write it down. Then, continuing to work backward—always looking for the next thing(s) that need to be done—chart all the tasks until you arrive at the beginning of the work. It may feel awkward at first to work backwards, but our experience is that this is the most effective method of building the workplan.

If two tasks have to or can be done at the same time (for example, someone will likely be doing a literature review at the same time as others are doing interviewing), chart those tasks *under* one another. When there is a time space between tasks, chart them with a space between them. Work through the entire task list in this way. It is alright to be flexible and make changes as you go along as long as you don't overlook or leave out tasks that you know will have to be completed.

Estimate how much time is needed to complete tasks

When you have charted all the tasks, go to the beginning of the chart and estimate the amount of time each task will take to complete. Be realistic—do not underestimate how much time each will take. For example, if you're planning 20 interviews allow two hours for the actual interview and at least two hours for writing it up. Do not plan more than two interviews per day. Unless interviewing is the only task you have to do, it's likely you'll be able to interview only two or three days in a five-day work week. Therefore interviewing 20 people, as a task, will take five weeks (two interviews per day x two days/wk = 4 per week).

When you reach the end of the chart add up the number of hours and days and then you'll know how much time it will actually take to do the entire project. Next, return to the beginning of the chart, put a starting date at Task A1, and using the time estimates associated with each task, add specific dates to all stages of the work plan.

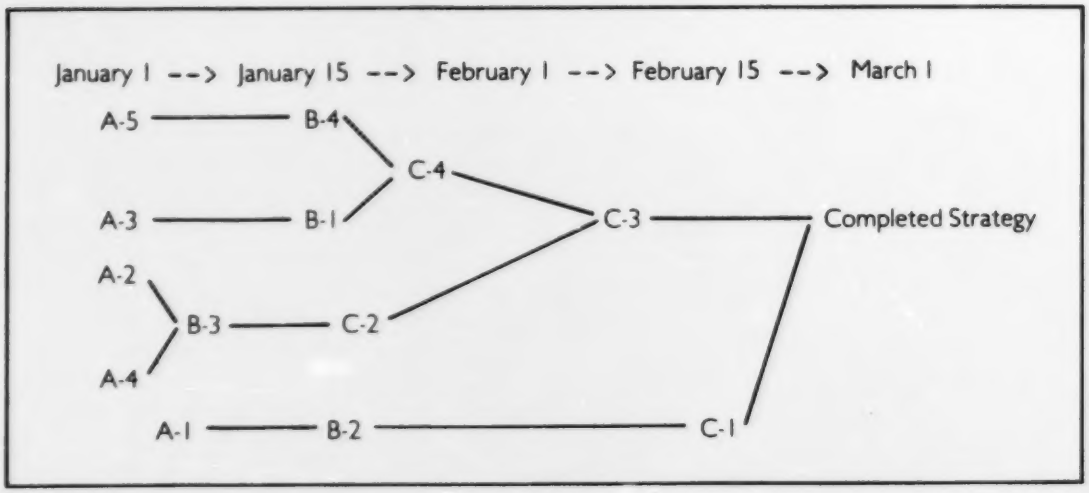
At this point it is common for everyone involved to be overwhelmed and surprised at the realization of how long the work will actually take. In fact you may already be operating with a fixed deadline (set by funders, fiscal year, limited budget, etc) and doing the PERT chart may make you realize how difficult, if not impossible, it will be to meet that deadline. If this is the case, (it often is as most groups try to do too much work in too short a period of time), now is the time to either revise the research process or make a decision to negotiate for more money and time from your funders, Board, etc.

Remember, revising the research doesn't mean doing the same work in less time, it means re-assessing the project and perhaps eliminating some objectives or aspects of the work completely.

It is crucial that the group involved in the research make these decisions together before the actual work of the research begins because trying to do too much work in too little time results in mediocre research, burned out workers, and strained credibility for the organization.

Connect the tasks

Finally, draw lines connecting tasks or sets of tasks to one another. Start at the beginning (there may be several "beginnings" depending on how many tasks have to be done at first) and move through the charted tasks, linking and separating lines as necessary. Doing this makes visible an accurate sequence of the work that will enable you to plan for adequate resources, including staff, space, equipment and supplies.



WHAT RESOURCES (WORKERS, MONEY, ETC.) DO WE NEED TO CARRY OUT THE PROJECT?

> What resources do you have? What other resources will you need? What costs will you have to cover?

Once you've established the research project's work plan and time line you can identify the resources you need to do the work. The research budget will depend on the resources you need: the number of researchers, the time it takes to complete the work satisfactorily and other items such as travel, phone calls, office rent, supplies etc.

Researchers

The number of staff varies with each project. A research co-ordinator will be needed at the very least. In our experience, committed volunteers are able to complete much of the interviewing and secondary research, but it does take longer for the work to get done because volunteers will likely be able to commit less time to the work than paid workers would. The group should weigh the pros and cons of numbers of paid versus unpaid staff in light of the existing funding realities and consider too the possibility of honoraria for volunteers.

Researchers' qualifications is a point that you'll need to discuss which will have implications for who you decide to hire. For example, in research on wife battering an understanding of the issue would no doubt be a qualification of project workers. Perhaps experience in actually working with battered women or working in alternative social services would be a requirement. For a women's centre perhaps knowledge of women's issues generally and advocacy or educational work would be prerequisites, depending on what the centre's areas of work are.

A major strength of action research methods is their "teachability"—so you may choose to hire and train women who have no previous research experience but who are enthusiastic about the project and about learning action research skills that will be of use to them when the project is completed. If this is the case it will be necessary to build in time and money to do the training workshops. The Women's Research Centre often develops specific training workshops for action research projects. Usually several one or two day training sessions are needed—one at the beginning of the project, another just prior to gathering the data, and a final session early in the data analysis process.

Review your preliminary ideas about suitable ways of collecting information to identify some of the skills your researchers should have. For example, if statistics or counting (i.e. how many women came to a workshop) is only a minor part of what the group needs to know, researchers with major strength in statistics will not be appropriate. If interviews with informants are a priority the researchers will need to have demonstrated skills in interviewing and experience in using that method of collecting information.

Research budget items to include are:

Researchers—salary and honoraria for paid staff, volunteers, consultants, etc.

Space—renting separate space, renting space from local group? What about light and heat bills?

Research duration—how long will the project run?

Evaluation—does the project require a paid evaluator? How long will she work? What resources will be needed to do the evaluation? (For more information on evaluation see: *An Evaluation Guide for Women's Groups* available from the Women's Research Centre)

Supplies—stationery, file cabinets, copy/word processing paper

Machinery—access to or rental of typewriter, word processor, copier

Telephone—long distance bills if you'll be contacting informants and others by phone; plus regular monthly phone bill

Resource materials—what's needed for literature review—do books need to be purchased, films rented?

Travel costs—mileage for car use, other travel needs?

Final report—cost of typing/processing, editing, proofing, design, layout, printing, promotion and distribution

WRITING OUT THE RESEARCH DESIGN

> Write a summary of all the considerations leading to the decision to do research: your goals, objectives and assumptions and how you plan to collect the information you need. The research design can also serve as a research proposal

The final step in designing a research project is the actual writing up of the research design. This process involves refining and clarifying all the considerations that have led to the decision to do the research. This design can also serve as a research proposal if you need to apply for funding or if you want to enlist the support or assistance of a specific organization.

Here is an outline of a research design:

Define the Purpose: a sentence or two which explains *why* you've decided to do the research project and how you will use the results (including the audience or target group you're aiming at or want to influence).

Describe the Context: a description of the situation or environment in which the research is being conducted (eg. who the group is; what are the physical, social, economic features or characteristics of the community/locations(s) you're working in, etc.; where you're starting from).

List the Research Questions: a listing of the questions the research will focus on; the questions you want to answer in the research and why.

Declare your Assumptions: an outline or listing of what you already know about the problem or situation you're investigating.

Define Goals and Objectives: what you plan to do with the information you collect and analyse; how you'll use it.

Describe your Methodology: how you'll carry out the project—including who will co-ordinate, be responsible for the project; how you plan to get answers to the research questions; where you'll go (who you'll ask) to get the information you need *and why*; how much information you'll collect *and why*; who will collect the information; how you'll collect the information—eg. using interviews, questionnaires, logs, etc.; what are your rules for confidentiality of information and why; your workplan—a list of the specific tasks you'll have to do to carry out the research with a time line; an outline of who will do which tasks, when; how you plan to analyse the information you collect; and how you plan to communicate/disseminate/act on the analysis (eg. a written report, workshops, etc.)

Budget: the estimated costs of the time and resources/resource materials needed for collecting the information; analysing the information; and communicating the analysis (eg. printing costs for a written report or the costs of workshops to discuss your findings, etc.)

CARRYING OUT AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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This paper is one of a six part kit on Action Research. The other five are:

I. THE WOMEN'S RESEARCH CENTRE AND OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH
II. AN INTRODUCTION TO ACTION RESEARCH
III. MAKING THE DECISION TO DO A RESEARCH PROJECT
IV. DESIGNING AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT
VI. COMMUNICATING THE FINDINGS OF AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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DIFFERENT WAYS OF GATHERING DATA

The gathering of data depends on what you need to know, who you need data from, who the research is for and what uses the research will have.

How a group gathers data depends on what it needs to know, who they need to get it from, who the research is for and what the group intends to do with the research.

The group may need to know numbers—for example "how many people have used this service?" and/or it may need to have explanations and descriptions about how women experienced a specific problem or service. The group may also need information to increase its understanding or analysis of a problem.

Information or data may be needed from users of a service, women who actually experience the topic being researched (battering, sexual abuse, childcare). Additional or primary data may also be needed from community agencies, specific government departments, other key individuals.

Is the group undertaking the research for its own purposes—increased analysis, understanding of service use, further program development? Perhaps the research will be used by agencies and government to change policies or legislation? Or is the research for overall community use—to provide knowledge and insight for better overall community development.

And what is the group intending to do with the research—use it for further analysis, for massive distribution, for very focussed lobbying efforts, or for internal use only?

So, begin the discussion about which types of data gathering tools to use by reviewing these questions. Even if you've answered them in earlier stages of preparation, do it again to clarify what will work best for your research.

In addition to gathering data directly related to the research objectives, the group should decide how it's going to gather data that describes the work of the research project and how it will keep accurate records of the actual research process.

Data gathering methods to consider include interviews, questionnaires, literature reviews, secondary research, keeping research log books or journals. Usually a number of data gathering methods, called tools or instruments, are used in any one research project. Consider what would be most efficient, effective and appropriate as well as looking at the resources related to the work—time, money, people, skills, materials, knowledge, etc.

CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE DATA GATHERING TOOLS

> **Chart the answers to the questions: what do we need to know?, where's the information?, who do we ask?, and what kind of information do we need?**

Deciding which data gathering tools or instruments to use requires putting together another chart. Refer back to the list of "what we want and need to know"—perhaps re-write that list on a fresh sheet of flip chart paper. Then write the following headings across the top of the sheet:

- Where can we get the information we need to answer these wants and needs?
- Who do we have to and want to talk with or ask?
- What kind of information do we need—numbers, in depth descriptions, opinions, other relevant literature on the topic, etc?

Developing this chart makes it easier to see what method of data gathering is most appropriate to the research questions. The answers listed here are also useful to refer back to when you are considering what specific questions or topics to include in the data gathering instrument itself and the number of people to speak with.

For example, in the Research Centre's single industry town research we (1) needed and wanted to understand women's experience of single industry towns so we knew that we (2) had to speak to women who lived in those communities, and as we (3) wanted in depth descriptions we (4) chose an aide memoire (a list of topics or issues to cover in each interview) as our data gathering tool.

The Anytown Women's Centre might develop a chart that looks like this:

need to know?	where's the info?	who to ask?	what kind of info?
women's status of women concerns	community women	women's centre users plus others	descriptions
other programs used/offered for women	other agencies and women	agencies and women users	descriptions and numbers
who uses women's centre	users	users	descriptions and numbers
what other models of service/program delivery would be effective	we develop model	ask other women	opinions

From this chart, it is possible for you to imagine developing an interview guide for use with women's centre users, and a different instrument for use with other agencies delivering services to women—perhaps a combination interview guide and questionnaire.

USING THE INTERVIEW AS A METHOD OF DATA GATHERING

> Interviewing is useful for descriptions and developing ongoing action out of the research. Decision-making checklist should include the amount of time that you need to do the project, deciding how many should be interviewed, and who to choose to interview. Specific interviewing tools include the aide memoire and interview guide

When to use interviews

Interviewing is a particularly effective data gathering method for women's groups to use when descriptions of people's experience are needed, and when you intend to use the research as an organizing or action tool. Because the interview process gives women the opportunity to tell their own story, as well as giving them a perspective on their own situation that they might not have had prior to being involved in the interview, they will often be stimulated to become involved in ongoing action. And of course, the rich descriptions of women's experience and knowledge usually found through the interview process provide depth to the topic and the opportunity for you to develop analysis that will be helpful to your group's ongoing action.

A specific example of how interviewing makes visible women's experience and gives the kind of information we need is found in women and resource town research completed by the Women's Research Centre and the Northern B.C. Women's Task Force in 1977. When we reviewed the literature at that time we found considerable research on the dynamics of single industry towns but the few references to women mentioned only "bored housewives syndrome." It was clear that women had not been spoken to, or if they had, they'd been considered only as a spouse and not as a person who actually lived in and used the community. Women were systematically omitted from the picture of life in single industry towns.

Some women residents of single industry towns in northern British Columbia, concerned about the situation of women and families in their communities, worked with the W.R.C. to develop action oriented community research that described, through a small scale interview process, the lives and work of women living there.

"Yes" and "No" answers would not have been useful to the research objectives; descriptions of how women lived and worked in the community were. The research tool chosen for the project—an aide memoire— ensured systematic gathering of descriptive and detailed interviews. The picture of women's lives provided by this research has been extremely effective in drawing attention to the concerns originally raised by local women.

Another example lies in research that looks at wife battering from the experience of battered women. The need for this research was underlined by the experience of local women active in the battered women's movement whose work revealed that contrary to the literature and the opinion of many social service professionals, battered women were not "problems" in and of themselves—the problem was the fact their husbands hit them. What was missing was research documenting the actual experience of battered women from their own perspective.

The research project utilized two interview guides and a questionnaire. The research, based in a transition house, used the questionnaire, called a research file sheet, as a special intake form for all residents over a specific period of time. All house workers and a selection of battered women resident in the house were interviewed. This combination of instruments was chosen because of the need to gather both statistical and in depth descriptive data over a relatively short (nine month) period of time.

The final research report of this project, entitled *Battered and Blamed*, served as a base for two other research projects, including one used extensively in preparation of British Columbia's new provincial wife assault policy. The report itself is now used as a handbook for battered women in transition houses.

So, if your group wants descriptions, wants to use the research process to expand its own organizing and information base, wants to involve and reach more women, then you should seriously consider using the interview as one method of collecting data.

Decision-making checklist for interviews

Time

Time is a crucial factor to remember when considering the use of interviews as a data gathering tool. Depending on the number of topics to be covered, interviews can take from one to three hours to complete and take about twice as much time to write up afterwards. (The Women's Research encourages researchers not to use tape recorders but to "train one's ears to listen" and write while the informant speaks.) This process, and the data analysis period that follows, is time consuming, but immensely worthwhile and necessary to the success of the research. It does mean the project must choose the number of interviews to be done according to the amount of time available to the project.

Deciding how many people should be interviewed

There is no rule that research must involve a certain number of people or do X amount of counting of opinions or whatever in order to be valid even though concerns about numbers and counting are commonly used to discredit research. The basic rule for all research is simply that the methods used must be systematic (done in a particular and consistent way) in order to provide a comparison of similarities and differences between situations.

Another rule in research is: document or record all decisions about numbers of informants, types of instruments used etc., as part of the research process. In other words, the work must be consistent in its methodology and the methodology must be clearly described. If a final report is written, this information must appear in the methodology section.

When making decisions about how many and who to interview it is important to remember that no matter how many people a research project involves, it never represents or can be made to represent everyone. Statements that generalize from the research, such as "Because 200 people answered 'yes' to this question then all women thing this way", are misleading and untrue. People who ask "How can that research be representative, they only spoke to twenty women?" can be told that the research is representative of those 20 women, and that the research findings can be used as a basis for developing analysis of a problem or situation.

The qualitative research methods described in this kit generally involve small numbers of people, usually less than a hundred and on average thirty women as the basic research population. What working with these informants in their own communities or work settings does is provide a descriptive base that expands knowledge beyond the limitations set by these numbers. Through interviewing, the research arrives at descriptions of women's situations and problems as they understand and experience them—this is the basis on which the research analysis and understanding is grounded. The research represents the people spoken to, and you must be clear about making this claim.

For example, some responses to the single industry town research already referred to reflected concerns that the women interviewed "certainly didn't sound like *my* wife—she doesn't think like that." Thirty women were interviewed for the study, so a valid response to such comments would state: "certainly all women do not think alike, but this research reflects the valid concerns of the women spoken to and is thus useful to use as a basis for further discussion and analysis."

In another example, interviews with battered women clearly revealed that their husbands beat them in a wide variety of circumstances. The common link was that in all these circumstances the husbands believed their wives to have broken a rule—even if it was an unspoken one. In the final research report, we described the full variety of circumstances and from this we concluded that these husbands believed they had the right to make the rules in marriage, and further that much of the rest of society believed that to be true also. What that led to was a clearer analysis and

understanding of how the wife battering is justified by the husband and society, and therefore how difficult it is for many battered women to leave their abusive partner.

We do not intend to discount the value and use of numerically based research, just to point out that research methods do not have to depend on "how many people said X and how many said Y" in order to be valid and useful.

If research does need to check on whether a particular problem exists or how many people hold a specific opinion, for example, then a questionnaire or survey will provide some numbers. Certainly the results tabulated from a closed question evaluation form handed out at the end of a workshop, for example, will enable one to say "four out of nine people filling out this form said they learned X from this workshop."

Deciding who to interview

To reiterate, choices about who to interview as well as the numbers of people to be interviewed, depends on what the research needs to know, as well as the time and resources available. Often the "snowball technique" will work: start by choosing people known to the researchers, then ask those people to name others, and move out from there. Or, when involved with a specific issue or concern, the researchers can choose to work with a particular group of people, or people who might not be involved with one another, but who share a concern about the issue.

Decisions made about informants in the *Battered and Blamed* study referred to earlier will serve as an example of how varying decisions were made about who and how many to interview. The researchers decided to talk to the staff and residents of one transition house rather than many because one specific house asked the WRC for help in putting together a project. Twenty-one battered women and fifteen transition house workers were interviewed; 148 research file sheet questionnaires were administered. Although one cannot generalize and say "because the women at this transition house said..., therefore all battered women say...," we can, and have, used the experiences these battered women described to understand what being battered is like for women. From that can grow analysis, policies, decisions that are useful to battered women and those who work with them.

The researchers decided to have all residents answer the questions on a research file sheet over a specific period of time because the questionnaire offered an effective and efficient way of asking many of the research questions. Researchers decided to ask battered women to volunteer to be interviewed in order to gather data on several other research questions. This decision was made out of respect for the situation of battered women coming to a transition house—to expect each women to go through an interview simply because a research project was in progress could be upsetting. 21 women volunteered—and therefore 21 such interviews were done. All fifteen staff members were interviewed because there was time to do it and because project members decided the different experiences and perspectives of each staff member were necessary data.

What we are emphasizing overall is that there are no magic numbers or methods regarding who and how many to interview. Each research project will have its own needs, based on the research assumptions, questions and objectives. The project doesn't have to represent everyone or claim that it does. It will represent the women—the experiences of the women—who are interviewed. As long as whatever decisions you make about who's to be interviewed, why, how many, etc, are documented and described in the methodology, the research will have a base to stand on.

Interviewing tools

Aide memoire

An aide memoire is a list of topics to be covered by an interviewer during the course of an interview. It is not a questionnaire but a topic guide used to ensure that data is gathered systematically.

Aide memoire means "guide to memory" and it serves that function for the interviewer, actually allowing you to act more as a prompter than a questioner. The aide memoire is intended to be a very open and investigative way of gathering information. The interviewer does not pre-suppose the answers but allows the actual interview situation to generate its own answers. (For an example of how this works, see the following page.)

The topics you include in your aide memoire arise out of the earlier group discussions about "what do we need to know?" Again, given the potential problem with time, be sure to refine the list of topics to be covered, drop topics that are not absolutely essential, and focus the topics by choosing ones that relate to one another. Do not choose too many—a two hour interview is the maximum time length to consider. The aide memoire used in community research asking women about the potential impact of an international pipeline being constructed near their community had eleven topics—interview length varied from one to two and a half hours.

It is always useful to pre-test data gathering tools before their "official" use. Take a draft of the aide memoire and interview someone (or several people), in the group itself. Then meet as a research group to discuss responses and change the aide memoire where necessary.

The interviewer uses the aide memoire in the interview to ensure coverage of the relevant topics in a systematic manner. That is, every interview covers all of the topics and in the same order. When the final interview notes are written up, the interviewer must always write out the way the questions or topics were actually asked. Write out the informants' responses in the first person, as they are spoken to the interviewer. The final write up of the interview includes any additional information that was given as well as the interviewers own impression of the interview.

Example of aide memoire

Interviewers: please cover *all* the following topics in your interview with informants. Please try to gather informant's *thoughts, knowledge, and experience* of the following key issues in their community and *how (if) they think the pipeline development will affect it*.

Topics:

Housing
Employment
Education
Health Services
Transportation
Shopping
Recreation
Social services
Child care
Crime
Community

Example of aide memoire

Introduction

"We'd like to understand how the recession and cutbacks have affected various aspects of the life and work of yourself and your family , both in and out of the home. In each of the topic areas we will raise, we will ask you to first of all describe what it is that you (or others in your family) actually *do*, then we will ask you to describe if and how that has changed because of the recession, and/or specific provincial or federal government cutbacks."

1. Work outside the home
   A. Your work outside the home (what do you do, impact of recession, impact of cutbacks)
   B. Your volunteer work outside the home
   C. Partner's work outside the home
   D. Partner's volunteer work outside the home
   E. Children's paid work outside the home (if applicable)
   F. Children's volunteer work outside the home

2. Work in the home
   A. Your work in the home (what do you do, impact of recession, impact of cutbacks)
   B. Partner's work in the home
   C. Children's work in the home

3. Relationship with community
   A. Your use of/involvement in community (describe what is it, impact of recession, impact of cutbacks)
   B. Partner's use of community
   C. Children's use of community

Interview Guide

An interview guide is a series of fixed but open ended questions that you ask, as the interviewer, usually with prompts to cover varying aspects of the topic the research needs to focus on. Open ended questions are just that—you ask the informant to answer in her own words, and you write down what she says. The interviewer writes the responses and prepares a complete account of the interview when it is over, using notes taken during the interview. The interviewer may ask additional questions during the interview if necessary, but you must be sure to include them in the final write-up.

An interview guide is put together by using the research objectives, questions and assumptions. Make it shorter rather than longer, and, we suggested for the aide memoire, pre-test it.

Example of Interview Guide or Schedule

Interview schedule for residents

1. What's it like living at the transition house?
   - (expand: what's an average day; what were you expecting when you came; what's good/bad about being here;...)
2. Re: family background:
   - why they got married; when; what she expected of marriage; had she lived on her own before marriage (relationship); religon (woman's and man's);...
3. Circumstances of the beatings/abuse:
   - when did they/it start; under what sorts of circumstances; frequency; what he said/accused her of as a reason for the beatings/abuse (effects of pregnancy, alcohol, jealousy, not allowing her to have friends, etc.)
   - kinds of abuse—physical, psychological, threats against her, forced sexual activity...
   - did his violence go beyond her—to the child(ren), sexually, outside the home...

4. How did she leave/what made it possible for her to leave?
    - when (i.e. to transition house); circumstances; had she left before; had she tried to get help before (specify); who was helpful (social worker, friend(s), family, doctor, transition house worker(s), clergy...); is relationship over; is he trying to contact her or is she thinking of going back or is he harassing her; arrangements re: visitation rights of child(ren); money...
5. What are her feelings now?
    - since being at transition house
    - needs that are or are not being met
6. What is she worried about/afraid of?
7. What would she like her life to be like 3 months from now?
    - where to live, employment, courses, etc. for her and for child(ren)

(Women's Research Centre, "Battered and Blamed" report)

USING THE QUESTIONNAIRE AS A DATA GATHERING TOOL

Questionnaires are useful when a problem is well defined and the research project needs to know how widespread it is. What's involved in putting together a questionnaire is outlined here.

When to use a questionnaire

A questionnaire is a series of questions usually answered by someone on their own—i.e. the questionnaire is handed out to them in the presence of a researcher or it is mailed or delivered. Making the choice about using a questionnaire depends on the research issue and the project at hand. Generally speaking, if a problem is well defined and a project needs to know how widespread it is (such as sexual harassment for example) then a researcher can draw up a questionnaire with questions to enable her to get a sense from a large number of women as to whether or not they experience the problem similarly or in the same way.

Sometimes it can be useful to combine specific questions with an interview guide or aide memoire but only when you need a few specific questions answered. If you have any more than a few specific questions, then you should reconsider using the aide memoire or interview guide.

How to put a questionnaire together

When designing a questionnaire remember to use the research questions, assumptions and objectives in formulating the specific questions. Make sure the questions flow easily from one to another and ensure that only *one* question is asked at a time. Number each question so that it's easy to tabulate the results. Do not make the questions too elaborate. Make sure questions are not ambiguous or unclear.

Questions can be open ended, closed or a combination of both. As we already noted, open ended questions are just that—you ask the informant to answer in their own words, using as much space as needed. Closed questionnaires use yes/no responses or "fill in the blanks." Open questions allow for more description. Closed questions are analyzed by counting responses, therefore they tend to take less time to collate.

If people are to mail the questionnaires back to you it is best to provide a stamped self-addressed envelope and to be prepared for lots of people to forget, or decide not to fill it out. Mailing out questionnaires allows a researcher to send out many, but she loses control over the return. Hand delivering and picking up questionnaires is labour intensive but offers more control over their return.

As it will always take you much longer than imagined to collate questionnaires, it is critically important not to ask too many questions, especially when you're depending on someone else to return the questionnaire. When the first draft of the questionnaire is complete, pre-test it by having perhaps some members of the research committee, or some of the informants you've already identified, complete it. The research committee should then meet to discuss responses to the questionnaire, and change it where necessary before proceeding further.

Example of Questionnaire

Profile sheet for participants in adult survivor's groups

The information we are asking for on this sheet will be kept *confidential.* It is information that we need to help us know who we are working for/with and what some of the circumstances of sexual abuse are. We will use it in planning and developing for better services and groups for the future.
N.B. Please use the space provided after some of the questions (or use the back of this sheet) to make any additional comments. Thank you.

Today's date: _____

Your age: _____ Marital status: _____

1. If you have children please state the age and sex of each child:

_____

2. If you have sisters or brothers, please give the age and sex of each:

_____

_____

3. What was your reason for coming to this group?: _____

_____

4. How did you find this organization?: _____

_____

5. Have you been to previous groups offered by this organization?:

   Yes:_____ No: _____

   If yes, what kind of group?: _____

   When was it held?: _____

6. Have you been to groups offered by another organization?:

   Yes:_____ No: _____

   Which organization?: _____

   When?: _____

7. Have you had any other kind of counselling?: _____

   Explain briefly: _____

   _____

8. How old were you when the abuse began?: _____

9. How long did the abuse last?: _____

10. Is the offender male? _____ female? _____

11. Age of offender when the abuse began: _____

12. What is/was the offenders' relationship to you (e.g. neighbour, father, brother, etc.)?

_____

13. What contact do you have *now* with the offender?: _____

_____

14. Please describe the abuse, briefly (i.e. what happened; what did the offender do to you):

_____

_____

_____

15. Where and when did it usually happen?: _____

_____

16. Who did you *first* tell about the abuse?: _____

What happened as a result?: _____

17. Who, if anyone, reported the abuse to the justice system?: _____

_____

What happened?: _____

18. Who, if anyone, reported the abuse to the social service system? _____

_____

What happened?: _____

19. Have you experienced any other kind of abuse (in addition to sexual abuse)—e.g. battered by husband? by father?: _____

By whom?: _____

When?: _____

Describe, briefly: _____

20. Have any other members of your family (brothers, sisters, etc.) been abused?: _____

21. By the same person who abused you?: _____

If not, by whom?: _____

TOOLS FOR GATHERING DATA TO DESCRIBE THE RESEARCH PROJECT'S WORK

> Use a log book and/or a journal to record project's work, keep minutes of meetings and an accurate, confidential file system.

Two types of record-keeping are useful in describing or documenting the work of a research project—a form of journal and a log book. A journal is a day to day account of the project including what happened each day (with specific notations as to why, etc.), accounts of conversations and other communications. Each project member can keep a journal, or one project journal can be kept by someone assigned to the task. Journals provide the basis for understanding and documenting the decisions made in relation to the project, its structure and its history.

A log book is less historical and more quantitative than a project journal in that it records the number and type of day-to-day contacts (e.g., who is referred to whom, by whom, and what kinds of problems are brought to the project.) It notes how busy staff are kept. The log book can and should be used by all members consistently, documenting the day-to-day work—phone calls, requests for information, service and education, etc.

Accurate minutes of research meetings should be kept as a way of recording decisions and changes that need to be included in the methodology section of the final report.

A well organized and confidential file system is an obvious necessity for any project, and provides an important way to keep track of data.

USING SECONDARY RESEARCH TO GATHER DATA

> Doing secondary research allows you to compare and contrast your primary research findings with other information

Primary research is the gathering of information from original or first sources—such as people, experiments, etc. Secondary research is done to collect information relating to your topic that you don't get with your primary research methods. Secondary research (or secondary sources) is useful because it offers an opportunity for you to compare and contrast your primary source findings with other information and it often gives you a lead to follow that could enhance your own primary research.

For example, the interviews with women residents in single industry towns gave us descriptions of what life was like for women, but we also needed to find out how many single industry towns had been built in Canada and what their economic history was. We got that kind of information by doing secondary research at the library and a study centre at a Canadian university.

Documents and records as data for secondary research

A record is any written statement prepared by an individual or agency for the purpose of attesting to an event or providing an accounting of a transaction and forms an official chronicle that is part of a larger work—usually on processes and proceedings of public affairs. Some examples are: hansard, birth records, city directories, membership lists, court records and business records.

A document is any written or filmed material other than a record that was not prepared specifically in response to some request from the investigator. Documents may be personal or public. Examples are letters, memoirs, diaries, position papers, speeches, newspaper articles, medical histories, government publications, photographs, policy statements and directories.

Documents and records represent a natural source of information and are usually available on a low cost or free basis. They are important sources of data for secondary research. For example, one can use records for "tracking" or following the official recording of transactions or events. A review of court records, for example, would offer an official record of what happened to battered women in the courts. Or, if a group wanted to monitor development or change in public opinion on an issue, they could collect newspapers and magazine clippings to provide documentation of this change.

Some guidelines for using the library to do secondary research

There are basically four kinds of sources to be found in a library: books, periodicals (magazines, newspapers, journals), reference materials and government publications. You can also use audio-visual resources such as audio tapes, slides, videos or films. When you are doing secondary research, you are usually looking for the most recent material on the issue being researched. Generally such material is available from periodicals, reference materials and government documents. Books are generally too far out of date, by the time they've been through the publishing process, to give you current data. They are useful, of course, in providing general background or analysis and should be part of the project's literature review.

Unfortunately, periodicals, reference materials and government documents are less familiar to the average library user than books. Since they are very important, it is worth consulting with the librarian about how to get access to them. To give

some idea of what kinds of things can be found in each category a list of examples is provided below:

Periodicals

In periodicals you can find everything from scholarly articles on the subject you are researching to newspaper accounts which may be relevant. In a large regional or a university or college library you will have more luck with finding a wide range of journals and the appropriate indexes to look them up in.

Generally, you can find periodical material by consulting the *periodical indexes*—lists of articles in various journals and magazines arranged by subject. The indexes are prepared by companies who monitor a selection of magazines and journals and then list all the articles by subject. Some indexes specialize in certain areas—like the Social Sciences Index, which carries mainly articles of a scholarly nature on social issues or other aspects of the social sciences.

Locate the index shelf and look in the front of the indexes to figure out how to read them—abbreviations and journals indexed are set out in the front. Ask the librarian to point out the list of magazines the library carries, where the periodical materials are kept, and whether you can make arrangements to borrow material from other libraries.

It usually takes a while to get used to working with the indexes. Decide beforehand how far back you need to search. Often there is no point finding articles more than two years old, but the time limit depends on your subject.

The Reference Section

The reference section contains things like catalogues, indexes, atlases and encyclopedias. These books generally cannot be checked out. Some useful things in this section might include:

Program Directory for the Province—a guide to all the programs sponsored or funded by the provincial government of B.C. (there is a federal one too).

List of Official Personnel of Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments—once you know the program or Ministry, this list tells you who to contact.

Organization of the Public Service—tells you who is responsible for what (there is a federal version too).

The reference section also contains policy manuals and bibliographies.

Government Documents

You can find annual reports, special publications, research papers and other materials prepared by the government in this section. Government publications are usually stored together, and are generally indexed by subject. Check with the librarian. A very important source in this area is the Statistics Canada material. StatsCan publishes a catalogue of all materials available. They also have a toll free number which you can call for information: 1-800-663-1551 (in B.C.).

Although final government documents are quite often not published right away, you can often find position papers, bills, white papers, etc. with current information on the areas which you wish to research.

Doing secondary research outside the library

Obviously, secondary material may be found outside of the library as well. Government offices or private agencies may have material you can use. Briefs, funding applications and other kinds of material are often available from community groups. Experts in a field may maintain a personal library. Clipping files are often kept by political offices, community researchers, resource centres, etc.

DOING A LITERATURE REVIEW TO GATHER DATA

> A literature review enables you to get a sense of what has been said or written about your research topic.

After initial data is collected, you should begin a review of relevant literature, i.e. other material written on the subject you are researching. A literature review helps to set the context for the research and enables all of you working on the project to get a sense of what is being said or written about the issue and how the work of the research fits or doesn't fit.

A literature review identifies statements and analysis that complement and supplement what informants have already told you about their experiences as well as identifying incorrect and inaccurate statements about the issue which should be addressed in your project's research report. Materials used in a literature review can include articles, books, conference proceedings, pamphlets, policy documents etc.

How to do a literature review

Begin by using the interviews or other information you've collected so far as a starting point. Read and re-read the interviews to be familiar with the trends, themes and issues they raise.

Then, using the sources noted in the secondary research section, select material to be reviewed. Read each selected piece and note on a file card or piece of paper the significant passages, chapters, etc which relate to the trends in the interviews. Note the page number and the issue being discussed. Be as specific as possible. Note

also any points the research should make or will want to make about the significant passage, chapter noted. If possible, also make comments about the overall approach or theory of the literature being reviewed.

At this point you should go through all the notes made as part of the literature review and be able to get a sense of the whole picture—such as common theories, useful statements, gaps that exist and how to deal with them. For example, if none of the material reviewed dealt with an issue you know is pertinent, note there is a gap in the literature review and try to locate an appropriate reference. If no reference can be found at all, then in the final report, note this as a "gap in the literature" generally.

At this time note or list points that the literature review indicates should be addressed in the report. The research committee can then discuss the results of the literature review and discuss how it fits with the other information you're collecting. should be used. Depending on the need, reviewing the literature may well continue on after interview analysis and report writing begins.

Keep an accurate bibliographical record of all the literature you review— this means that for each item you read you must list the author, title, publisher, and publication date. These literature sources should be written up for the bibliography in the final report.

SOME RULES ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is an important issue—for the content of the information collected as well as the process of the project and it is necessary for the group to work out its own rules about how confidentiality will be respected and maintained.

1. Confidentiality in research is important and discussions about protecting confidentiality should be taken very seriously by your group. Keeping information confidential is a measure of respect for informants and is especially important if your group wants to use the research findings for ongoing action, improved services etc.

2. Always protect the confidentiality of your informants at all times during and after the research process. Protect the confidentiality of the research process and content during the work of the research. The only things you can discuss outside of the research group during the project are the issues that led the group to do the work, and the research goals and objectives.

3. If you wish, develop a short written statement about the research project, (how you came to do it, what the objectives are). This can be given to informants at the start of an interview or others curious about the work and allows everyone involved in the research to say something consistent about the project. We have found this to be useful when research is being carried out by a group in a smaller community—especially if the research topic is considered "controversial." Use the written handout if the local press or radio hot-line asks for comment, and tell them you will be able to share more information when the research is finished.

4. If your informant, during the interview, names places, people or things about herself that will identify her or others, you will have to protect her confidentiality and perhaps that of others when you write the final report by removing or changing names of people and places, ages of children etc. This is especially important when you're working in a small community where lots of people know one another. Sometimes the naming of people, services or facts is relevant to the research—i.e. assessing social services may be part of what the research is all about. In these cases it would be proper to allow identification of the service, although perhaps not of the actual staff.

5. Decide on the method you'll use to code your informants. There are a number of options. You can give them made up names or use numbers, letters or a combination of numbers and letters. Write their code name/number next to their actual name on the master list and from that point on use the code to identify the interview or any documentation related to that person. Make a habit of referring to the informant by her code even if you remember who she actually is.

6. As you locate informants, develop a master list with their name, code, address and phone number on it. Make a copy of this list and file both of them in a locked drawer or filing cabinet.

7. When the research is complete the research process, including measures taken to protect confidentiality must be described in the methodology section of the final report. Often, but not always, a list of demographics about the informants is included as an appendix. These items, usually collected on a face sheet at the time of the interview could include age, marital status, number of children, income level, employment status etc. Of course the face sheet must be identified with the code also and must not include names or features that could identify informants. Discuss within your group the demographics your research projects needs to collect when you decide what kind(s) of research instruments to use.

Example of Face Sheet

(this sheet can be used to collect numerical information along with aide-memoire, interview schedule, or questionnaire)

Code Name _____

Interviewer _____

Code _____ Address _____

Date _____

Place of interview _____

Time–Start _____ Finish _____

Number of Contacts—

Phone _____

Letter _____

Other _____

Relationship to Interviewer _____

Why Chosen _____

How Long at this Address _____

How Long in Town _____ How Long in Area _____

Family/Household Make-Up _____

Heard About Project From _____

Interest in Project _____

Comments _____

Age Group 16-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-64, senior citizen

Education _____

Family Income $5000-10000 10000-15000 15000- 20000 over 20000

Children's age group—pre-school, elementary, high school, left home

(Women's Research Centre, "Beyond the Pipeline" report)

INTERVIEW SKILLS

There are key points to remember before you start, as you begin, during and after the interview.

Here are some guidelines to follow if you decide to use interviewing as a means of collecting information—using an aide memoire or an interview guide. It's important for interviewers to be well prepared before doing an interview. To help interviewers prepare themselves, consider holding a two hour training session to review these guidelines and perhaps even "role play" an interview. The more comfortable the interviewer is the greater the chances are that the interview itself will go well.

Before you start

1. Make arrangements to interview the woman alone, without partner or children around if possible.
2. When requesting the interview, clarify how much time you estimate the interview will take.
3. Supply yourself with something hard to write on such as a clip board, and write your interview notes in a coil bound notebook as the pages are easy to write on and turn. Use a reliable pen—take two.
4. Plan to have the interview guide or aide memoire close at hand so you can refer to it comfortably. Read it over beforehand so you are familiar with it. When the final notes are written up, you must include the question asked with every response but during the interview it is more efficient to simply write the number or letter of the question beside the response rather than writing out the whole question. Any questions you've asked in addition to those on the aide memoire or interview guide must be recorded in full and included in the final write-up.
5. Do not use a tape recorder. The process of writing encourages the interviewer to pay close and respectful attention to what is being said and stops you from going off on tangents. Writing interviews as they occur is one of the best ways to learn to rely on your own head and train your memory. A final reason for not using a tape recorder lies with technology—they often break down or record incorrectly. Transcribing tapes also takes a great deal of time.
6. Decide on the code name or number to be used for this informant, in order to preserve her anonymity.

As you begin

1. Introduce the project and yourself. Use a handout—a brief written description of the project—as a basis for introduction.
2. Confirm the confidentiality of the interview—explain how it will remain confidential.
3. At the start of the interview describe briefly what kinds of topics will be covered in the interview itself.
4. Ask the informant to help you with the necessary data for the *face sheet* that accompanies each interview. Depending on the project, face sheet data can include some or all of the following: age, geographic area informant lives in, education, salary, occupation, number of children, marital status. Sometimes filling out the face sheet prior to the actual interview helps to "loosen" things up. However, some researchers feel more comfortable asking these kinds of questions at the close of the interview after a trust has been established between the informant and interviewer.
5. If you haven't already got the informant's name and address, ask for it now so you can send a thank-you letter. Do not put this information on the face sheet or interview notes, put it on another piece of paper, then transfer the information to the master list of informants when you return to the research office.
6. Tell the informant that you will be writing the interview rather than taping it. Assure her that if you have trouble keeping up with her, you will ask her to slow down a bit so that the notes are accurate. (If you still have trouble, write a brief note in the margin and leave a space so you can go back to that spot once the interview is over and fill in the spaces with what you do remember.)
7. Remember to focus on descriptions rather than problems. The interview is a way for the informant to tell her story. The research is not looking for deviance, or to prove or disprove personal theories.

During the interview

1. Remember that your job is not to record your opinion of what the informant says, but to write the informants actual words as much as possible. Writing in the first person helps, i.e. using "I" not "She." Try to write every word but develop your own "shorthand."
2. The interview is a conversation so relate to the informant in that way. Listen carefully. Go where the informant leads but be disciplined so you don't go off on tangents—or stay off for very long. This means at times you may have to say

"that's an interesting view, but let's get back to the topics to be covered in the interview..."

3. If the informant seems uncomfortable, try to discover the sources of discomfort. Is it your manner or does she misunderstand the project? Perhaps the informant doesn't feel that what she wants to say is acceptable. Make it clear there are no right or wrong statements and the interview is requesting help in learning about the informant's experience.

4. Be natural about agreeing and disagreeing. Arguing with the informant will keep her quiet—too much neutrality might make her say what she thinks you want to hear. You can always agree first with what is said, then pose alternate questions.

5. Don't worry about silences. Wait for the informant to decide what to say. Often what comes after a silence is very significant.

6. It is important that the informant focus on her own experience. It is common for women ,when interviewed, to talk about everyone else but themselves. Interjecting by asking "how did you feel about that" or "what did you do..." will usually help to get discussion focussed back on her perspective.

7. Draw out information by using more questions or asking for clarification—phrases like "could you tell me more about that?" or "what do you mean?" are useful. Sometimes its helpful to use your own knowledge to assist with a question, for example "some women say..." or "some women have experienced...."

8. If the informant does not want to discuss a certain topic or question, do not push for a response. Instead, try to find out why she doesn't want to talk about it and record this in your notes.

9. At the close of the interview ask the informant how she feels. Depending on the topic, interviews can sometimes be upsetting. At the very least, the informant may feel vulnerable at having talked and shared so much information. Tell the informant she may get in touch with you if she thinks of anything else to add, or if she just wants to talk. Thank her for her time, for her information, and for agreeing to be interviewed.

After the interview

1. Write up the interview notes as soon as possible after the interview—preferably on the same day. The longer you wait the more you're likely to forget. Type (double space) the interview if possible. If the interview is being handwritten, use ink that will reproduce through a copy machine, double space, and write legibly.

2. Add interviewer's comments as appropriate. For example, if the interview was interrupted you might note: "children came home half way through the interview and informant was less focussed afterwards...."
3. File the interview.
4. Write a thank-you letter to the informant.

ANALYSING RESEARCH DATA

Data analysis can begin while the research is in progress as well as after all data has been gathered. Steps in data analysis include cutting and re-filing interviews by topic area, key word analysis, locating and pulling together similar themes and developing significant outcomes from the research.

Analysis of data while research is in progress

There must be no public discussion of the research material while the project is in progress. This betrays any confidentiality that may have been promised. As well, it is unfair to the participants, the project and the workers to draw conclusions before all the necessary material has been collected and analyzed.

It is useful, however, for a specific group—a research committee—to meet on a regular basis to discuss the findings to date. The committee can:

1. Review and analyze the data collected
   - what does it say?
   - are we getting as much info as we want/need?
   - what's missing?
   - can we isolate any themes?
   - what are the significant outcomes (discuss and come to agreement)
2. Adjust research focus as needed (remember to record, perhaps in the project journal, all adjustments or changes)
   - are there questions we need answers to now that we didn't know about at the beginning?
   - how do we best deal with those now? e.g. add a question, accept the limitations, plan to do another project some other day?

Guidelines for data analysis once all the data has been collected

1. All original data should be copied and the originals filed. Work with the copies.
2. Be sure to code or number each piece of data so you will be able to trace who said what.
3. *Read the data.* Look for patterns in the responses. Make notes on what you see. Use your intuition at this stage. Note the comments on file cards or sheets of paper—one for each question, issue or topic. This will allow you to see more readily the emerging patterns.
4. A useful step in analyzing interviews is to cut up the photocopied interviews and file them in separate theme or question areas. Then you can easily look at all the responses to one question and begin to more effectively note recurrent patterns of response by sorting through them.
5. Key word analysis is a method used to track recurring words or descriptions used by informants. Begin by going through the data, perhaps with all the responses to one specific question, and list all the words or descriptions that mean the same thing. This begins to give an overall picture that you can conceptualize and write about.

   For example, in response to a question regarding women's use of their community during a recent economic recession, the following phrases were pulled out of the interviews by using key word analysis:

   - don't get involved
   - tend to withdraw when I'm unemployed
   - less involvement
   - we don't put down any roots here
   - haven't been able to do anything
   - friends constantly leaving
   - have made more commitment because of recession
   - careful when I get my welfare, don't want people knowing

   From this key word analysis a picture develops and can be stated as follows: "In response to a question regarding how women use their community during a recession, the majority stated they used it less. Women described feeling less involved, or wanting to withdraw due to unemployment or being on welfare. One woman, however, felt she had made more commitment to her community and was making a point of shopping at local small businesses and helping with the development of local support for the unemployed, etc."
6. Use exact quotes from the interviews in the notes you make. This will help to ensure that responses are not misinterpreted, or that if they are, you will be able

to catch the mistake. Always write the informant's code number beside each quote so you can easily refer back to the complete interview if necessary. (Of course, do not use the code numbers in the final research report)

7. Too much detail is better at this stage than not enough. It is always easier to cut down than it is to add information later.

8. Combine the results of the secondary research with the primary research by comparing what the secondary research findings say in comparison to what your primary research findings say—where are the links, gaps and overlaps? Make notes of these so you can include them in your outlines and report drafts.

9. Significant results or conclusions should be discussed by members of the research group or committee. Reach agreement on significant outcomes. If you can't agree, decide how you'll deal with the differences.

10. Do whatever counting the data allows to aid in the analysis. For example, a questionnaire may be a series of "yes" "no" answers and it is easy to count the responses people checked off.

11. An individual's own analysis comes into play during analysis of the data. Whoever is doing the work of collecting the information and analyzing it is going to use their own assumptions to try to explain the information they are receiving. That is an accepted part of the process as long as people declare where they are starting from and what their own pre-conceived notions are. Now is a good time for the research committee to review the original research assumptions developed at the beginning of the work and declare what each person sees now that the information is collected. What did everyone expect to find? What did we actually find? How do those assumptions fit with other assumptions we might have picked up while the data was being collected? In the analysis phase all these assumptions are being scrutinized.

12. It is absolutely crucial to *stay with what the people have told you* and let the data guide the analysis and ongoing writing. For example, in one health project the researchers originally thought stress and nutrition were going to be the issues—and they declared that in the beginning. When the interviews were analyzed those issues did not appear in the way that researchers thought they would—lack of adequate sewage facilities and sidewalks were the issues raised by local women. The final report recorded the issues that were actually raised by the informants and referred to what the researchers started out with as their pre-conceived notions.

13. The business of analysing data is time-consuming but rewarding. Everyone will feel confident about the results if the analysis has been done thoroughly.

COMMUNICATING THE FINDINGS OF AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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This paper is one of a six part kit on Action Research. The other five are:

I. THE WOMEN'S RESEARCH CENTRE AND OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH
II. AN INTRODUCTION TO ACTION RESEARCH
III. MAKING THE DECISION TO DO A RESEARCH PROJECT
IV. DESIGNING AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT
V. CARRYING OUT AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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USING THE FINDINGS OF A RESEARCH PROJECT

> What does the information you've collected and analysed tell you about how you can use the results of the research? How does this compare with what you originally planned to do with the results? How will you use the research and why?

Once you have collected and analysed the information for your research project you must decide how to use what you have learned. Research isn't magic; it can't by its existence solve problems or change situations. But it can be *used* to accomplish those ends. From the process of planning the research project and stating/defining why you're doing a research project, what the project's goals and objectives are and so on, you will have thought about (and recorded or written down) what uses can be made of the results of the research

Review the goals and objectives and any other statements you've recorded about what you intended to accomplish and how you intended to act on the research results. Think about what the analysis of the information you've collected tells you about how to proceed. You have choices about how to present and act on the research results. If the analysis of research data indicates some course of action you hadn't anticipated, pay attention to it. Let the analysis of the data ground and guide your decisions as much as possible. After all if you could have been absolutely certain about what you should do before you'd collected and analysed the information, it wouldn't have been necessary to do the research.

Writing up the analysis in a formal research report is the most common way of communicating or presenting research findings and we will describe, in the following pages, how to do this. However, in doing a formal report you need to be clear about who it's aimed at, who the audience is and how the report when it's written can be used or acted on by your group and others.

In addition to, or instead of, a formal report you may decide to write an informal report. An informal report is a report that is less detailed and comprehensive than a formal report. It could include a brief account or description of how the research was done with a summary of findings and/or an outline of the findings that you decide are most significant for the report's audience or target group as well as the plans you have for follow-up action based on the research. This kind of report may be suitable for a funder, for example, who has provided financial assistance to your group not for the research, per se, but for the research as part of your group's lobbying effort, program planning, educational work, et cetera.

You may also decide to hold meetings of your own group and/or workshops for or with other groups, agencies and individuals based on the implications of the research for planning, lobbying, advocacy, public education and so on. Whatever presentation

you decide on, be sure to think about how you will publicize your findings including what kind of media strategy (press release, press conference, etc.) you'll need.

Consider these and any other possibilities you think of and work out a plan to guide you in carrying out whichever decision(s) you make.

Questions to consider in deciding how to make use of research findings:

1. What were our original goals and objectives for this research project? What does the analysis of the information we've collected tell us about how to proceed now?

2. What do we need to do now? Why? Be specific. For example, if you need to report in writing the analysis of the information, what form will be most useful and why? Who's the intended audience? How do you want the audience to use the analysis you present? How do we expect the audience may respond? How can we prepare ourselves to deal with the response?

   If you decide to do workshops based on the analysis with certain agencies in the community, what will this involve? How many workshops, which agencies, and why?

   If the findings are to be used in the group's own planning, what process will be followed? What does this mean for how the findings are presented?

3. What resources (information, workers, time, money) do we *need* to accomplish each of the things we've listed? For example, whether or not you've decided to write a formal report on research findings, it will be necessary to put the analysis of the data in written form so other members of your group and/or the women who will do workshops or whatever can have access to it. In addition, if you've promised informants a copy of the research findings, you must honour this commitment.

4. What resources do we *have* available? What resources do we have to obtain? How can we get what we need to do the work? How does this effect the timeline of our work and the work itself?

WRITING THE REPORT

> Writing the report begins with point form outlines long before all the data analysis is complete and ends with the final data analysis informing you about what to write.

Just as there is a mystique around doing research, there is a mystique around writing a report on the research. Some people have the idea that once the interviews

are analyzed, numbers counted, literature reviewed, that one takes pen in hand and starts to write the report from start to finish in full sentences. Nothing could be more misleading!

Before even putting pen to paper, you should discuss what you want and need included in a report. Part of the content depends on who the report is for. If the report is for the group's use only, then a formal written report may not be useful—perhaps a summary of research findings with recommendations related to the research objectives will be more appropriate. If the report is being completed for a funder, or another agency, then consider the audience as well as your own research objectives and prepare the material accordingly.

Writing a report begins with point form topic outlines and the first of these outlines can start to be shaped before all the data has been analyzed. Remember—it is common for several content outlines to be developed before all the data is in. In fact, outlines can change all through the writing—so much depends on what the data tells you. Most early outlines will break into sections dealing with responses to specific research questions.

An outline is a series of headings with point form statements about content made under each heading. It is useful to number and letter the headings as follows:

I. Major heading (chapter, section, etc.)

A. Sub titles or sub-sections
1. major points to be made
2.
3.
a. more specific points within a major point
b.
c.
i. quotes, further details within major points
ii.
iii. etc.

B. Second major sub-title or sub-section

II. Major heading (chapter, section, etc.)

Let the data analysis inform you about what to write. Once you have cut up the interviews, done the key word analysis, completed secondary research and literature review and compared it with data findings, you will see some themes emerging. That's when you find the data has something to say and you have something to say too. Write an outline for each of these theme areas or sections, then start to "flesh it out" with full sentences, points of comparison (one person said this, three people said that...one agency felt this way, four others that way etc), references to the literature (a similar study noted that...), direct quotes from interviews, your own thoughts etc.

You will need to properly introduce each section at the beginning and summarize it at the end. By the time you have to write the final draft, you should have organized the sections so they flow logically from one to another.

Some points to remember about writing a research report

1. Writing up the research is a time consuming phase—more time consuming than you will imagine. Generally speaking, writing the report takes approximately twice as long as the data collection phase. It is absolutely crucial to allow enough time to write the report well.
2. Remember to book time for a typist or word processor if you need one, and to allow time for writing several drafts, editing, proofreading, printing, binding, and for writing things like an abstract, table of contents, footnotes page, bibliography etc.
3. Protect the confidentiality of your informants in the writing stage by removing any unneeded reference points that might identify the person—such as names of towns, positions held, places worked for, etc.
4. Be sure to include information about the purchase cost of the report and where copies can be obtained.

ORGANIZING THE RESEARCH REPORT

> Organize the research report to include everything you want to communicate about the research project.

There is a basic style to follow when organizing a research report. The following report outline contains all the points that you should include in your research report.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

1. Introduction to the project: describe
   a. how the project was conceived, conceptualized, funded
   b. what research purpose was
   c. who was involved
   d. the context in which the research was done
   e. research project's decision-making structure

2. Description of research methodology: describe
   a. research approach used and why it was chosen
   b. research goals and objectives
   c. how research instruments were designed and implemented
   d. how informants were chosen, how many and why, range of people represented, who did interviewing
   e. any limitations to the research

3. Analysis of research findings
   a. describe different research objectives
   b. note the results from the data collected
   c. make the research focus clear and be precise about what project was after
   d. describe how conclusions have been drawn from the data
   e. in examining the answer to the research questions, look for patterns of response—note and explain both similarities and differences in those response patterns and relate them to the overall project framework
   f. do not try to cover every aspect of everything—pick out patterns, recurrent themes and analyze what those relate to

4. Conclusion
   a. conclude with a summary of the findings and of the analysis made by the research
   b. include recommendations for further work arising out of the project (commonly called "need for further research")

5. Bibliography, Appendixes

PRODUCING THE RESEARCH REPORT

A development planning sheet and production check list are guides to use in producing a research report.

It's important to give careful consideration to what kind of publication you want to produce and what the actual production will involve. The following development planning sheet and production check list can help to keep you on track.

Development planning sheet

Working title of report:
Group developing the report:
Date:

1. Who is the publication for? (audience) How many people are in the intended audience? How many of them do you want to reach?
2. Purpose: What are you trying to do with the publication? What information will you be conveying? What do you want the users to do after they have read the material?
3. How will it be used? (read, photocopied)
4. Will it need frequent updating?
5. What other publications or information are in the same field? How is this one different?
6. Do you want graphics? what kind? What do you want them to do? (attract attention, reinforce certain points, look nice?)
7. What ideas do you have for promotion, marketing and distribution? (pending conferences or workshops, magazines or journals for reviews, contacts with women in appropriate area(s))
8. What is the most that the publications should be priced at? Should it vary? If so, how?
9. What size should the book be? What kind of format? Does it matter?
10. Who holds copyright?
11. What are the time constraints? (promises to funding bodies, whether it will go out of date, when is it needed?)
12. When will the first draft be ready? The final draft?

Production checklist

task	by whom?	by what date?
1. Development planning sheet completed		
2. Draft manuscript		
a. received		
b. reviewed		
c. comments incorporated		
3. Second draft manuscript		
a. reviewed		
b. comments incorporated		
c. edit		
4. Copy edit done		
a. corrections incorporated		
5. Design		
a. type		
b. graphics		
c. overall rough mockup approved		
6. Type set		
7. Proofread		
a. first set of galleys		
b. corrections set		
c. corrections proofed		
d. 2nd set of corrections		
e. 2nd set proofed		
8. Layout		
a. layout done		
b. layout proofread		
c. corrections made		
d. corrections proofread		
9. Printing estimates and arrangements done		
10. Layout approved		
11. Printing done		
12. Distribution arranged		

DEFENDING YOUR RESEARCH

> Do not make unfounded claims about your research; be clear about how you did the research; and evaluate your research project as soon as possible after it's completed. Develop specific responses to the challenges that are commonly put to research about women.

No matter what form you choose for presenting your research findings, it is necessary to be prepared to meet challenges about either the findings themselves or the way in which you did the research (i.e. research methodology) or both. Even if the challenges never materialize, being prepared for them is not only wise but it may also serve to increase your confidence in presenting your research and, thus, help to forestall the challenges altogether.

Rules to follow in defending your research

First, do not make unfounded claims about your research. That is, if you've interviewed or received information from, let's say, thirty-five women, do not claim that your findings represent the views of all the women or the whole population in the community or workplace or situation you've investigated. Don't generalize beyond your means. But you *can and should* make the claim that your findings do represent the views of the women you've interviewed or questioned and that their views and concerns are valid. Further you can and should point out what the implications of their views and accounts are for understanding the issue or problem you've investigated, for particular programs or policies or strategies, and for work that needs to be done. Remember your own specific objectives for the research and use them as a guide in presenting and making statements about your findings.

Second, be clear about how you did the research, the methods you used. In describing your methods, use your own words—avoid using jargon or terminology you aren't sure about. Use the minutes of research committee meetings and the records of decisions you made about methodology during the research process to produce a brief, simple description of the process which you can use to explain how you did the research and why you did it that way. In addition to helping you to feel that you're on solid ground in defending your research, using simple language about the research will help others to better understand how research can be done and, thus, you can help to de-mystify research. There are many different research methodologies; avoid debates about how the method you've used is better or worse than others and focus instead on how and why this method worked for you.

Third, evaluate your research project as soon as possible after it's completed. This will help you to be clear about what you actually have done in the project, what you've accomplished and what its limitations are. The self-evaluation section of ***An Evaluation Guide for Women's Groups***, published by the Women's Research Centre in 1986, provides a simple procedure for evaluating your work. What's required is a day and a half long meeting of project participants to assess how well your project met its own goals and objectives and what implications the project has for future work.

Defending research about women

In addition to these three rules, it's important to remember that research which focuses on women's experience or concerns—like other work on women's issues—is often dismissed or attacked. Here are a few of the common challenges we've encountered and some responses to try.

One of the things people might say (and these people can be women or men) is "Well, these are human concerns, concerns of all people, not just women's concerns..." This statement can have a remarkably paralyzing effect on any discussion you might be having. Why? Because it is a form of dismissal of the stand you have taken as a woman speaking to these issues and because it, yet again, takes the ***woman*** out of the picture.

One response might be to say, "Yes, but the humans I'm talking about are women" and continue on from there. Or, "Yes, it is a human concern and women are humans with specific expertise on this issue," or just "This piece of work deals with women because they have something to say that hasn't been heard before so I'm going to talk about it as a women's concern..."

The other side of the statement about "these issues being so useful and important that they are all people's concerns" is the one that says "Oh, but these are only women's concerns." The implication here is "where are the men?" Again, this is a way of subtly diminishing you and your work. It may be unintentional or intentional. The only response here is to state emphatically that the study/research etc. had ***women*** as its focus so that's what it talks about. It wasn't designed to talk about men except in relation to women. Perhaps you can add that a review of the literature regarding the issue you've researched shows remarkable few studies focusing on women, so this one is a landmark study!

A very common remark is that "all the women do in this study is bitch/complain." Part of what's happening with this kind of remark is a put-down of women who are not satisfied with the status-quo. The dictionary defines complaining as "expressing dissatisfaction or stating a grievance," and that may well be what you're doing. There's no need to be defensive about that. Perhaps you can simply say "There are lots of unsatisfactory situations facing women and we're saying something about them"...and then get right into the discussion. In other words—women don't

have to deny our complaints. Instead, turn their complaints about women into a way to talk about the issues.

We are all familiar with the remark "Well, you're just a bunch of women's libbers, my wife wouldn't be concerned about those issues," or "I don't want to join up with you, you're feminists and you hate men and I still want to live with my man." Usually when people make a remark of that sort they are trying to denigrate the work at hand by declaring it doesn't represent the majority. Well, you're not pretending to represent the majority of women. Women are not monolithic—we do not all think alike. No piece of research ever represents everyone. But you can state clearly that the research does represent the women you spoke to—their concerns *are valid*.

Finally, research on women's issues is almost always contentious. But is is also worth doing and worth doing well. By doing research to document women's experience and concerns we can gain valuable information and analysis to guide our action strategies and programs. We can also contribute to validating women's experience, help to build a body of knowledge about women's reality and break the silence that for so long has surrounded women's lives.